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A Public Landscape for Galveston, TX

by

Stephen Engblom

A THESIS SUBMITTED
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

MASTER OF ARCHITECTURE

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ABSTRACT

A Public Landscape for Galveston, TX

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Stephen Engblom

A lack of non-commodified public space in Galveston was revealed through a series of analysis. The current state of a town that is undergoing a transformation from an agro-industrial economy to a tourist based economy is fertile ground for urban hypotheses. Responding to this need, a site was identified: a fringe area of downtown Galveston, left vacant because of the demise of the agro-industrial economy. Seeing potential for this site to perform as a public landscape for Galveston I use a process of abstraction to develop an architectural transformation strategy. The abstract nature of the proposed design is rooted in a very real comparison to the existing condition of the city tissue.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There's a bumper sticker with which I empathize: "I wasn't born in Texas but I got here as soon as I could." First, I need to thank those who helped me get here: everyone at the short-lived School of Architecture at UCSD, especially Margaret Crawford, Dana Cuff, Craig Hodgetts and Adele Naude Santos.

Houston has been very good to me: Thanks to Anne Christensen and Reagan Miller for reading my thesis before it was time, Kurt Aichler for keeping me employed, Jim Ezrow for kind encouragement and my first painting commission. A special thanks to Wiley Hammersmith, a third generation Houstonian, who as mentor and friend has inspired me to undertake the project of a lifetime: Life.

I'd like to thank the Rice University School of Architecture. Kathleen Roberts was the first person with whom I came in contact and appropriately the first I'd like to thank.

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Most importantly, though, I'd like to thank Scott Strasser, who as a studio teacher, introduced me to a systems approach to design. This approach became the basis for the most architectural phase of this thesis. Beyond his design expertise though, Scott offered me encouragement, like I have never had before, to believe in my work. He did all of this freely, spending hours discussing my project.
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Project Background

At the beginning of the thesis process I was encouraged to develop a thesis based on a conflict I had in my architectural education. By looking at my architectural experiences I was able to highlight several issues that have reoccurred in my work: Painting, Industrial Zones, Urban Issues.

While in high school, my first architectural mentor was an artist. We would go sketching at the abandoned steel mills in southeastern Pennsylvania. These previously mute buildings became architecture as we would sketch the forms, volumes and surfaces.

As a student at Lehigh University in Bethlehem, PA, in the late 1980's, my world was affected, both physically and psychically, by the Bethlehem Steel’s five mile long home plant. Observing these buildings taught me lessons about scale, structure and materiality. Life in a defunct steel town, albeit as a visitor, taught me the realities of economic hard times. The parts of the city-as-machine were jammed, the plant was closed, and the town was out of work.

In 1992, I lived in San Diego where I was overwhelmed by the intense natural beauty of the place and learned first-hand why it is a tourist Mecca.
However, when I ventured downtown, the traditional working core of the region, I was enamored by the presence of the naval yard, where huge aircraft carriers docked, and giant shed buildings where aircraft were built. These were the physical and financial equivalent of the steel mills of the east, giant dinosaurs whose economic demise have left the city looking elsewhere for revenue. Downtown San Diego had to reinvent itself, and tourism seemed the obvious answer. City planners and developers searched for a fantasy version of the perfect seaport town. As a result the forces of privatization (yacht clubs and condos), commercialization (luxury hotels and thematic seaport village), along with the military, now represent San Diego’s economic building blocks. Together, these private and government interests cut the general public off from the essence of their city by completely blocking public access to the waterfront. Reliance on these externally supported economies makes San Diego especially susceptible to economic recessions.

Since 1993, I have lived in Houston, where industry and its supporting commerce were the seeds of the city’s existence. There is an abundance of industrial buildings in the Houston region, ranging from petroleum processing plants to agricultural storage and transfer facilities. Given my
personal interests, I initially set out to find a project having to do with
industrial buildings. After locating the agro-industrial complex in Galveston
my investigations began to ring familiar themes. I saw similarities to the
Rust Belt -- decrepit working class neighborhoods and failing economy due
to the slowing of activities at the wharves -- and to San Diego: tourism-based
fantasy land renovation of the downtown waterfront.

I set out to investigate industrial buildings by attempting to distill architectural
lessons through formal analysis. My first task was to locate a group of
industrial buildings to analyze. My eyes were looking for formal issues:
composition, color, materials, scale, and structure. In order to understand the
appeal of these industrial buildings I seek to analyze them through modes of
analysis that distill their essence: structural integrity, materiality, human and
machine scales. I also intend to document these buildings and any hybrid
types that may develop using a wide array of media, drawing methods and
models.

Two areas of particular interest were the turning basin of the Houston Ship
Channel and the agro-industrial Galveston wharves. Both targets were
compelling for aesthetic investigations. However, the Galveston site proved
more interesting on the basis of site. The complex is right in the midst of the
downtown of the city, it is densely arranged in a relatively small area. The
Galveston wharves are occupied by buildings which by virtue of their
industrial uses fall outside of the body of buildings thought of as high
architecture. present a workshop where one can learn architectural lessons.
Yet, these industrial buildings exhibit virtues that are often taught in
architecture school -- a few of these virtues that I recognize: promenade,
regionalism, scale, materiality, structural integrity, positive/void spaces. The
spaces around the building create promenades through a series of spaces
appropriately scaled and choreographed for the interaction of machine and
human. In fact, this sense of appropriateness seems to be the quality that
works throughout the buildings and the spaces.

Despite my formal interests, I became intrigued with the social and economic
roles that the wharves play in the life of the city. The artifacts of the city are
the components of the city that provide discernible fabric. By identifying
artifacts that exist in the city of Galveston I hope to identify the qualities of the
built world which speak to the inhabitant of the city in a visceral way. Such
an investigation asks of the language of architecture: Do buildings need to
speak in terms of orders or styles to be considered architecture? Or is it that we need eyes which see in order to perceive them? How is it that such an investigation is different for us today than for architects at the beginning of our century, who were also obsessed with the mundane and with industrial architecture rather than with the definitions of architecture prescribed by the academy.

In response to the state of architecture in his day Le Corbusier said “Architecture has nothing to do with styles,” which was a study of historically catalogued stylistic treatments. He learned lessons from the simplest of buildings as well as from high architecture. Today designers who claim disdain for those who use Greek temples for their styles, hide behind everything from physics to philosophy to psychoanalysis and continue to avoid dirtying their hands with the mundane. For them the answer to solving the problems of urban crises lies in coming up with the right new building style. But being in flux means more than changing the aesthetics of a building it means broadening the definition of what constitutes architecture. Architecture is a medium that is less plastic than others, such as advertising or art. But if an appreciation of other aspects of the built world were incorporated into the design realm of the architect, the ability to affect the built
world would increase. Developers are much more adroit at recognizing new ways to affect the built realm of our cities.

The actual design of the public space could not have been undertaken in an abstract way if this information were not held at a distance. My final oral defense of the project focused on the design presentation which was a display of photographs and paintings and a model. This design was a departure the research herein documented, and was a process that stood on its own. So too does the research, and therefore it is presented here as a full and independent process showing my methods of gathering and interconnecting information.
Zone 1 Galveston Wharf, Spring 1995

Arrival

You enter the complex by crossing a threshold of railroad tracks crossed by freight trains whose presence create a gateway for the industrial zone. Once beyond the threshold, you are confronted by a choice of spaces: to the east, is a scaleless expanse with a distant view of grain silos, to the north a pedestrian scaled loading dock provides a partial screen to a large plaza in front of an Imperial Sugar warehouse.

The Sugar Building

The sugar warehouse is a large triangular volume whose steel bones and corrugated metal skin are honestly expressed. The patina of the building’s metal sheathing is a suitable backdrop for the solitude of the space. At the front end of the building, facing the large open space, there is a metal structure that hints at the sectional uses of the building’s interior. At the rear this is further revealed by the chutes and ladders and conveyor belts used to shuttle the sugar from boat to building to train.

The short facade of the warehouse defines the far edge of plaza. To the right
side, the longer edge a loading dock serves as a verandah. The asymmetry of the space owes to the placement of the buildings -- none are square to each other and yet there is an order that proceeds from the use of the space. The central space is scaled for trains that approach the sugar building and to unload their cargo onto the raised platform arcades. Today, without the train, the experience is surreal: overscaled for arrival by car and silent when inhabited alone. The surrealism of the space is further enriched by a sense of openness as one looks north beyond the sugar mill out to the port. An eastward view to the grain Elevator B is available with a large grouping of grain silos and diagonal delivery buildings stalking on legs, in the middle ground. As these longer views are experienced, the observer retains a sense of enclosure offered by a continued flanking of the space by the low canopied building to the west. On the east, although the arcade stops, another picks up, thereby framing the distant view. The strong Texas sun passes overhead and strikes the elements of this environment, approximately north-south in their alignment, forming deep shadows in its path. Especially poignant is the face of the sugar building itself, whose exposed metal structure at the south face acts like a huge sundial within the space.
Verandahs

Original programmatic requirements -- ability to load and unload trains and trucks, and the response to the climate -- overhead protection from the rain and sun -- shaped the space. Today, in their current state of disuse, these covered loading docks are, in a practical sense, not functioning. Yet, if viewed in a purely architectonic sense they continue to serve a purpose. These raised spaces define the long edges and give a humanizing scale to the central space. They also soften the brutality of the box buildings to which they are attached by offering an inhabitable shaded space. The emptiness of the space frees the imagination: like shaded arcades from which one can take in view of a public square and a monument or perhaps a cathedral beyond, these loading docks are transformed into verandahs providing a place for viewing the central space and the sugar building. Galveston Case Study
Houston-Galveston Region

'The Island' -- as the B.O.I. (born on the island) population affectionately call their home -- emphasizes the distinction they draw between themselves and Houston. Despite this local view, Galveston is part of the Houston metropolis. The metropolitan Houston urban fabric does not match traditional urban models that would exclude a seemingly well-defined town such as Galveston. The Houston region breaks down into a network of small clusters that combine forces to create an economic region. Galveston is a perfect example of one of these clusters, despite several obvious objections.

First, it could be challenged that Galveston is not part of the Houston metropolis. Over the past century, Galveston has resisted becoming part of the Houston region. Yet over that period the trend towards dependence has continued. From an outsider's view, the Island's economy is integrally tied to the greater region. Consider that federal funding targets the Houston/Galveston region as one; or a resident who commutes between the two. This is especially true today with an increase in the dependence on the tourist economy. Second, Galveston's downtown is a pleasant neighborhood complete with a pedestrian component. This pedestrian environment now targeting tourist traffic relates more to the dispersed fabric that is associated
with the Houston metropolis, than to the population of Galveston as a small town.
Galveston Identity Crisis

Galveston has always been a dense city, dictated by its physical limitation as a narrow island. Its reputation as a city developed out of an early desire to be cosmopolitan, and it was known during its earliest years as the Manhattan of the South.¹ Today, Galveston presents itself to the outsider as a resort town offering beaches and seasonal festivals. Yet a single visit to the island suggests that it is more than sand and imported festivals. The skyline is defined by the wealth-producing components the city—great industrial complexes on both sides of the port as you cross the causeway and The University of Texas Medical Branch (UTMB). As you drive down Broadway and look beyond the grand mansions and old churches, you see vast working class neighborhoods of elevated wooden houses. Galveston’s sultry mystique, spawned by the early success of the city, has a reputation around the country, quite a feat for a town of its current size and stature. But its industrial prowess is waning and an attempt to retain this mystique has been laid on the shoulders of tourism. Festivals and retail-tourism are glamorous goals and could be important pieces in shaping of an identity for Galveston: Mardi-Gras and the Dickens festival that relies on 19 century English themes, serve the renovated Strand zone as seasonal advertising campaigns, but are ineffective at

¹ Fornell, The Galveston Era
sparking the economy of the city as a whole. Nor does it provide a public spouse free from commodification for the city.
Galveston Harbor History

The greatest asset Galveston possesses is its bay, documented as the best natural port of the Gulf of Mexico. As a result of this natural bounty, Galveston developed into a town that enjoyed a very cosmopolitan reputation during the middle of the nineteenth century. Today Galveston is no longer a city with a worldly reputation for cosmopolitan lifestyles. It has long lived in the shadow of Houston, its fast growing inland sister. Two reasons for this have to do with the port of Galveston.

First, the access to the waterfront has historically been used for the support of the economy, i.e. fishing and shipping, and therefore under private control. Just previous to the Civil War, several of the most powerful wharf owners created a monopoly at the port, thus forcing their competition to relocate key warehousing facilities to Houston. This turned out to be bad timing for the Galveston wharf owners, as the political debate over which direction the Texas rail system would take was concurrently being fought. At the behest of these businessmen who relocated there, a decision was reached to construct these lines northeasterly towards St. Louis and New Orleans, thus favoring Houston and leaving Galveston displaced as the hub of Texas land freight.
Second, the hurricane of 1900 killed 6000 people approximately, 18 percent of Galveston island at the time. The dead were taken out to sea for burial. They washed up on the shores and had to be recollected. Piled on a pyre, they were taken out in the port and set afire. Such a disaster predicted for some the death of the Island city; yet the city survived and continued to grow, but never again at the same pace.

With both the short-sighted financial fallout of the wharf monopoly and the floating cremation of the city’s population in 1900 on the harbor, it is especially ironic that the port such a rich natural bounty continues to be hoarded by low volume dying industrial concerns and only recently has been opened up to the public by a new use -- retail.

Various industrial and agricultural complexes, which stretch westward from the downtown to the causeway that connects the island to the mainland, are under the jurisdiction of the Galveston Wharves Authority, a jointly held

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2 p.221, Mason, *Death From the Sea: Our Greatest Natural Disaster.*
*The Galveston Hurricane of 1900*  
(The Dial Press, New York) 1972
private and municipal authority. If you add in vast warehouses and train track fields that lie inland, this area makes up a enormous percentage of the Galveston ‘center’. The result is a surreal landscape of vast open space covered in concrete, dotted with colossal buildings that astound in scale and perplex in composition. This zone has been off limits to the general public, until recent times, when some of the central areas were re-inhabited as part of The Strand transformation, offering commodified public access to the waterfront for the first time.
Galveston Housing Stock

Galveston has a strong tradition of low income housing. The worker’s housing stock ranges from large public housing projects to single family housing. The large housing projects date from the late 1940s through the 1960s and are badly in need of repair today. The single family residences specifically identify themselves as Galvestonian by standing off the ground as protection from possible flooding. This housing stock for the working class is large -- testifying to the volume of the Galveston port traffic at the time of their construction, which required a large low-medium-skilled labor force. In the late 1940s redevelopment plans targeted dilapidated housing for replacement. As a result, these working class neighborhoods, made up of many individual family units, were replaced by the housing projects now extant in the northwest quadrant of the city. Similar to housing in other urban areas, they are modern in vocabulary but built to high standards. However, having been maintained at a low level and having housed a population plagued by a dismal economic reality, they now exude a dismal character. Drug abuse, low education levels, and high unemployment continue to ravage the populations in both public and private housing. Today, both housing stocks are inhabited by a minority mix of African Americans, Mexican
Americans, Vietnamese Americans and the elderly of various racial backgrounds. Most recent efforts in housing aid in Galveston have been managed by the Resolution Trust Corporation, which has taken properties obtained through the fallout of the S&L scandals and re-financed them as low-income housing for individual families.\(^3\)

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\(^3\) From conversation with Pattie Bixel
Galveston Public Space

Galveston provides Houston with two public spaces, one commodified the other, public: the Strand and the beach. The Strand is a well preserved street of old commercial buildings with broad sidewalks and deep canopies that provide shade and protects from rain. This picturesque setting was seen as worth saving, for redevelopment into tourist/retail center. Planning studies by Venturi, Rauch and Scott Brown provided an early vision (1975) that helped shape the space as it exists today. More recent efforts have included development of the waterfront itself by the Mitchell Corporation. The Pier 21 complex now sits on the water offering restaurants, shops, museums and a hotel as well as plenty of parking. Municipal efforts have also spent considerable energy re-building Galveston’s beaches that have a constant battle with erosion. Such renovations are designed to improve Galveston’s image as a consumer-tourist destination. At best these new ‘public spaces’ produce income for the area, especially important in an era when the city’s industrial heritage is waning. At worst, they use scarce city funds to subsidize recreation for tourists, thereby robbing the coffers for local interests. Compare to findings on Baltimore:

First of all, Baltimore is a clear example of the shift from an industrial
to a service economy. Revitalization efforts must confront that fundamental fact. Second, adjustment to basic economic change cannot be accomplished by rearranging land use and putting up end buildings. A human investment strategy is a necessary element in any transition to a regulated economic foundation.  

Monumentality and Artifacts

Theories on monumentality can be used to identify the strengths and weaknesses of each of the three targeted zones. An approach that maximizes the potential of each sector could be developed. These sector-specific approaches could be a powerful element of a zoning code for each area.

Monumentality Index

*Age-Value       universally objective
                  ultimately self-destructive (results in rubble)
                  egalitarian
                  appeals to the emotion.

*Historical Value scientific
                  original stasis of object
                  preserves original
                  produce accurate facsimile
                  historical valuists would halt decay

*Intentional -
Commemorative Value counter nature’s effect on monuments

*Use-Value       decay renders-monuments un-intentional
                  S. Peter’s would be depressing not evocative if abandoned.

*Art-Value       No-decay of shape or color

*Newness-Value   Must be restored to erase decay and appear like something newly created.
*Romanticism Fanatical historical value.\textsuperscript{5}

Galveston is a textbook of differing approaches to handling artifacts. The grand old houses along Broadway are preserved for their historical value as museums. Old houses near the medical school are valued functionally as restored houses for the upper echelon of the island’s residents and the medical students. Even the beach is protected from the natural process of erosion, a costly process judged worthy of investment because of a use-value for the city.

Although large portions of the working-class Old Central Neighborhood were destroyed in the 1960’s, earlier preservation efforts on the island were more fruitful. When the grade level of the city was raised after the great hurricane, both the monumental, and the non-monumental were saved. As a result, Galveston’s center has a great collection of buildings, ranging from the grand mansions and churches along Broadway to the working class neighborhoods on the south side of Broadway, that have survived since the beginning of this century. This equality in preservation between the monumental and the


(Rizzoli, NY) 1982
seemingly non-monumental buildings was at the time an extremely egalitarian effort. The fact that they survived is due more to a lack of economic development of the Island. Today, a respect for both the monumental and the mundane could be a prime example of a ‘field approach’ to historic preservation. On the relationship between the memory of the place and the construction of the individual monument urban planners use certain terminology:

- early conservationists
- conservationists planning
- monuments = Gems
- areas = settings for the gem

Rather than just preserving the “important” buildings of a past era, when a whole context of a built environment is preserved a distinguishable urban fabric develops that manifests the history of that environment. Historical Preservation efforts have raised real estate values and have thus created affluent neighborhoods. While city policy, from the 1940’s to the 1980’s, for the working class neighborhood, showed disregard for the buildings and short sightedness in terms of the value of the community to the city, and as a result the urban fabric in these areas has deteriorated in some places it has

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6 p.29. Ashworth and Turnbridge, The Tourist-Historic City
disappeared.

Despite the sweeping destruction dealt by the 1950s urban renewal efforts, this field approach to preservation can be and should be extended to include the construction of this period. Recent trends of Modern historic preservation that have protected and preserved modern masterpieces can now be harnessed to raise consciousness of the value of preserving the buildings of this era. By honoring the architecture of these massive housing projects, these buildings become legitimated. Likewise the fragments of the Market Street corridor can be celebrated by preserving the few clues that remain as reminders of the by-gone era.

The Strand Area

As with the trend throughout the nation, public investment has been re-directed from housing to efforts that are seen as conducive to spurring spin-off investment in the city. In Galveston the earliest such project was focused on The Strand, a major street of Galveston’s downtown located directly adjacent to the port district. The Strand’s old commercial buildings are age-
valued as a setting for re-use as a new shopping/tourist center, while their
density is use-valued as a setting for a popular public space. In contrast to the
greater Houston Megalopolis where there is an acute lack of historical
neighborhoods and pedestrian experiences, The Strand sector, with its well-
preserved, densely arranged historic buildings provides both. These
characteristics of the area were newness-valued by the developers who have
sanitized and transformed the street into a shopping and tourist destination.
The effect of re-inventing the Strand sector as a festival grounds has had a
positive effect on the resurgence of tourism in the area. The public space is
use-valued. Sidewalk cafes and street fairs celebrate the space. However the
nature of the age-value transformation has transformed the area into a
sanitized shopping mall geared to the middle class tourists, on the surface it
has removed some of the charm of the gritty oldness of Galveston, but on a
deeper level, totally divorcing it from the working-class heart beat of the city.
This transformation of The Strand area can be viewed in two ways: on the
one hand the ceremonial archways are part of the successful renovation of the
area into a festival oriented public space within the city. On the other hand,
this can be seen as a dangerous trend towards isolating this area as a theme
park that only serves tourists.
The Wharves

The agro-industrial buildings along the wharf's edge are historically valuable as artifacts of the development of Galveston's economy. Their art-value appeals on an emotive level: size, materiality, color. The relationship between The Strand (specifically Pier 21) and the wharf buildings is an art-value based relationship. The wharf buildings are used as monumental icons, and thereby thematized in an art-valued way.

The use-value is easily dictated by the market forces that rule in this zone. The buildings are not realizing their potential and are therefore endangered. The relationship between the wharf buildings and the Pier 21 complex is threatened by the economic collapse of this industrial area. What type of investment is needed to revitalize a decrepit industrial zone? How important are these buildings to the success of the development of Pier 21 and The Strand? Would the buildings remain powerful on a art-valued basis if they too were turned into a shopping mall?
When considering the industrial buildings at the wharf’s edge, the question of whether to value the buildings based on art-value, or on historical-value becomes relevant. The difference being: how do you preserve the buildings? At The Strand a historical value approach dictated a re-fitting of the buildings to look clean in order to celebrate the old in the familiarity of the new. Such an approach, used in a blanket way in the Wharf area, would compromise the soul of these buildings. Yet, in some cases, economic concerns for the city should come first. On Pelican Island, an industrial zone directly opposite, for example, Bechtel Corporation is planning a complex for the construction and repair of off-shore rigs. This type of development benefits the economy as well as providing new industrial activity, and thus dramatic new backdrops, to the Pier 21 complex. Likewise, it should be argued, if any new enterprises can be encouraged to re-inhabit the wharf areas, they should be allowed. However certain of the buildings are of such architectural prominence that they should be preserved for posterity. Equally devastating is the danger of robbing these building of their integrity.
The Old Central Neighborhood

The range of functions provided by this neighborhood has resulted in a wide array of potential monuments: housing projects built in the 1950s, empty lots along Market Street, and defunct cotton warehouses. Recognizing the value of each piece could result in realizing the pivotal nature of this zone, thereby defining a role for the neighborhood within the Galveston city as well as within the Houston region.

The housing projects are a valuable pieces of history, representing an era of high modern design. Recognition would increase their historical value. They also fulfill the important link of providing housing to the lowest-income group of the city's population and therefore deserve a use-value designation. It is argued that these buildings are unsuitable for housing poor populations because of their starkness. This argument should be refuted on the grounds that such complexes have met success in other parts of the world where supporting systems, from simple landscaping to complex social infrastructure, help community life. The use-value and age-value of these buildings need not be at odds with each other. What they need in order to be compatible is social investment. Such investment could be lumped into the
use-value category because social investment in this zone would acknowledge the importance of allowing life to be productive for the lowest-income groups of the city. Such investment would imbue the public housing with use-value. Such investment is essential to containing the rising costs of supporting the welfare status of this currently dislocated population and will, in the long run, prove cost effective.

Along Market Street, discovering monuments of the extinct commercial corridor takes a little more detective work. Case in point: at the intersection of 26th and Market there used to be a popular movie theater, the Carver. During the 1970’s the theater as well as the rest of the entire city block was razed. This block at the intersection of 26th and Market was the heart of the Black community. Today, there exists an electricity depot and transmitter tower. This abominable misuse of civic power of destruction needs to be remembered. All that remains of the theater is the decorative pattern in the concrete that denoted the corner entrance. When called to the attention of the observer decoding the ‘text’ of the paving becomes history and therefore assumes an historical-value. When valued in this way such markings empower the area that was destroyed by short-sighted urban “clean up”
efforts. When highlighted as encoded text, these artifacts reveal a past which played an important role in the lives of the working class of the city, a role which needs to be reconstructed today.
Commodification of Public Space

A perfect example of creating new artifacts within the city is the Galveston Arch Project. In the late 1980's, in an effort to re-invent the Mardi Gras celebration in Galveston using the Stand area as the festival grounds several big name architects were hired: among them Aldo Rossi, Charles Moore, Ceasar Pelli, Stanley Tigerman, Michael Graves, Helmuth Jahn, and others.

Rossi, Aldo *The Architecture of the City*

Morphology: description of the forms of an urban artifact.

Aesthetic intention and the creation of better surroundings for life are the two permanent characteristics of architecture.

Because architecture gives concrete form to society and is ultimately connected with it and with nature, it differs from every other art and science.

The problem of choice by which a city realizes itself through its own idea of city.

1. description, classification, typology
2. structure of the city in terms of elements.
3. locus/urban history
4. urban dynamics/politics

Discussing the role of artifacts in the city, Aldo Rossi states: “Although they are conditioned, they are also conditioning.” Rossi’s response to this
commission is a way to compare his rhetoric to his architecture. A setting where there is a wealth of architectural artifacts and authentic public space seems to be at odds with the construction of new ‘artifacts.’ How can the design of new ‘artifacts’ be conditioned by authentic surroundings while conditioning a new type of public space in their midst? When designing temporary “monuments” in the shape of archways to be placed at prominent spots throughout The Strand, how can an architect remain respectful of the authenticity of the buildings in the surroundings? The role of these archways is an important one as they help to create a festival grounds out of a public by creating gateways into the zone as well as markers throughout the area. By strongly defining the edges of the district, the space has become a shopping mall thereby cheapening the authenticity of the old buildings. Depending on your agenda these archways can be seen as the evil force, malling a public street, or a positive player in helping to celebrate the fabric of the entire zone.

+ Temporary monuments can economically help to define a zone within a city.
- Theme Park nature of the Strand becomes an island within the city detached from the neighborhoods.
The temporary nature of these monuments is perhaps their greatest asset. Relatively inexpensive, the archways successfully helped to re-invent The Strand as a festival ground. Can there be lessons learned from such a project that could be extended to the other two areas in this study? Rossi’s attempt at conditioning the space has been very successful but the stylistic references he uses for his archway fail at being conditioned by the authentic nature of the context.

The Pier 21 development uses the waterfront and the vistas to the agro-industrial buildings as monumental thematic backdrops. Allowing public access to the waterfront can be viewed as the real success of the Pier 21 complex. A success that came with a price tag in terms of lost authenticity. In order to gain access to the waterfront at the bay, where banana boats used to make their daily deliveries, the old buildings and docks were destroyed and a new restaurant/hotel, marina, and museum complex was constructed. This complex, Pier 21, now exists with brick paved streets lined by wrought iron lamps and bollards. This old time imagery creates the picturesque street scene one that has replaced real history with a new imagined history. The entire atmosphere of the Pier 21 development suggests a public street; yet the
text of the place, written on an extensive array of signage, reveals the project’s private identity and authority.

Though the complex is made up mostly of built space, there are two open spaces. These spaces open grounds for conjecture based on the way they are presently used: a swath along the water, about 20’ of blacktop paved area, and a large open green space. On one occasion an arts festival was advertised to take place on the grounds of the complex. The open green space was fenced off and an entry fee was required, thus functioning as a commodified public space which exists in the interim as land being held for future development. The parcel of pier that is left open as a public space is exciting because of the vistas to the water and the industrial buildings available to the pedestrian without program or admission fee. This is truly public access to the history of Galveston. The monumentality of the wharf buildings is used as a thematic backdrop for new waterfront commercial development; simultaneously celebrating the wharf buildings and thematizing the Pier 21 complex.

The link between the two sectors is further embellished by the tourist versions of the history of the Galveston wharf. The Pier 21 complex houses a Seaport
museum that allows an interested person to learn more about the history of
the area which they just viewed, thereby presenting an image of celebrating
the history of the site. The aesthetic design of this pier would suggest an
appreciation of the history of the site; yet it in order to do so, it destroyed the
buildings which previously stood on the site.

The reconstruction of the past & the re-interpretation of the
present .... stand as a series of texts that can be read by the
general public.\textsuperscript{7}

\textsuperscript{7} P7 Martha K. Norkunas, The Politics of Public Memory: Tourism and Ethnicity in Monterey, California
Comparative Case Study: Monterey, California

Another interesting parallel is the case study of Monterey, CA as covered by Martha K. Norkunas in her book, *The Politics of Public Memory: Tourism and Ethnicity in Monterey, California*. The story involves a similar story of the renovation of a wharf into a commodified theme park for shopping tourists.

These canneries came to represent more than Monterey’s industrial heritage. Industrial capitalism represented an effort to colonize as many in many areas. The native Americans in the area were colonized by the Spanish, just as the Mexicans were overthrown by the Americans. So too, did the industrial fathers of Monterey attempt to dominate and colonize nature. They invested tremendous financial resources in the canning operations....Nature had been harnessed to the good of capitalism. A major problem occurred when the sardines virtually disappeared from the sea....As in other American cities, workers were left unemployed and the huge factories were left deserted...In its new identity as a tourist environment, why did Monterey leave the canneries as a testament to this industrial era...? In fact had the canneries been removed, the sea, the victor as it were, would have been revealed....Instead the past was re-interpreted by the physical transformation of the canneries. The passage of time, historical time and fictional time initially effected a seemingly haphazard result on cannery row. Reinterpreting the past has allowed the city to effectively erase from the record the industrial era and the working class culture it engendered. Commentary of the industrial era remains only in the form of tourist interpretations of the literature of John Steinbeck. Steinbeck, the only snag in the sanitized progressive penetration has
been recoded to nostalgia.\textsuperscript{8}

*Cannery Row*, a work of fiction by Steinbeck is now our best record of what the Cannery zone was like. Even the name of this section of Monterey is derived from the title of the book. The real history of the area is effectively gone, thus demonstrating the power of theme park architecture in destroying and re-presenting and mis-representing history.

"Authenticity derives from the object being conserved, while heritage derives from its users."
-Ashworth and Turnbrige

This quotation is taken from a discussion about the tourist-historic city. Such a city harnesses artifacts to create an aura or character for the city. This has been largely successful at inducing consumer class tourists but has had little effect on raising the quality of truly public space in the modern city. A prime example is the way in which the buildings along The Strand function. Buildings that are authentically old have been meticulously conserved; yet the heritage of the place is gone due to an over thematization of the space into a sterile environment. This zone is artificially held away from the city

\textsuperscript{8} p. 49 Martha K. Norkunas, *The Politics of Public Memory: Tourism and Ethnicity in Monterey, California*
environment by virtue of contrast. The pristine condition of the streets of the
Strand starkly contrasts with the bombed out environment of the Old Central
neighborhood which, at points, is only one block away. This contrast is
deepened by the way in which the buildings of the Old Central
Neighborhood have been and continue to be neglected. During the 1970's the
attempt to clear the sector of vice and crime was to raze buildings, thereby
representing a lack of respect for the old housing stock as having any age
value. Post WWII large parcels of the medium intensity industrial areas
were replaced by low rise-high density housing blocks. This wide spread
replacement made sense at the time because housing was needed badly. The
loss of the manufacturing base has continued to hurt the citywide economy.

Ironically, today these 'modern' structures are the ones being called urban
blight. Boarded up and awaiting renovation or razing so that more
appropriate housing can be built, the 'modern' lines of the old housing stock
are deemed inappropriate for healthy living; and in keeping with current
trends pitched roofs and shutters are prescribed as the panacea. The current
plans romanticize the buildings by adding peaked roofs and commodifies
them by packaging them as townhomes for sale. Even the housing
commissioner is skeptical. The planning commission, as recently as 1992,
stated as their goal for this neighborhood: “Encourage the condemnation and demolition of dilapidated structures within the neighborhood.” Such a statement would be made more effective if it were to acknowledge the role of age-value salvaging of structures in the neighborhood.

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9 p. 22 Galveston Department of Planning and Transportation, Old Central and Carver Park Neighborhood Plan (Galveston City Government) 1992
Human Investment & Physical Re-development

We have endured a seemingly perpetual urban crisis now for at least the past thirty years. It was a crisis first perceived by the light of the fires that gutted numerous cities in the mid 1960’s and one that sparked an initial wave of public concern. Erupting at the height of the era of urban renewal the riots mocked our earliest efforts to arrest decay and social disorder that seemed to older American cities after World War II.

We have since become, moreover, a suburban nation. Political currents similarly shifted, and attention paid to urban cores decreased dramatically in the 1970’s and 1980’s. The shift to a postindustrial service economy, the mobility of capital in a dynamic global marketplace, and the aging of urban infrastructures combined with racial and demographic trends to isolate the poorest populations, those with the least resources to cope with changing realities. Consequently, as minority populations have increased and, indeed, come to dominate many of our cities, the problems associated with the long-term decline of urban America have deepened. Yet our cities remain. And their health remains essential to the nation’s well being.  

Applying this argument to Galveston is simple. It makes several points that I think are crucial to an urban project. One: our urban woes will not be solved by abandoning our cities. Two: urban revitalization schemes must consider both physical redevelopment of the built city as well as investment in the human potential of the population. Emphatically stated, investment in physical redevelopment without social infrastructure is unproductive. The

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urban riots of the 1960s marked the realization by the architectural community that large scale urban re-building programs alone were not a panacea to the decay of our cities. The same efforts of architects and planners to build a better city that won architectural praise at the time of their inception were scorned by the architectural community when they were razed, just decades later. The icon of this type of project, Pruitt-Igoe in St. Louis, Missouri, stands for the lesson: the built cannot compensate for the political marginalization of a population that has been disconnected from the life of the city. Unfortunately, it has taken awhile to arrive at this lesson.

Following the destruction of Pruitt-Igoe, a different homily was being preached: rise, high density public housing is bad. In response to poor results in large projects, architects and planners re-grouped and different ratios of architecture and social programs achieved varying results: small scale projects were seen as more appropriate, increased human investment programs combined with decreased architectural programs. Despite sporadic success stories, faith in social and architectural interventions has fallen, and the problems of inner city public housing have worsened.
History of Galveston Investments

Galveston is a high maintenance city. A constant battle with both the environment and the economy has hampered growth for the past century. A failure to replace industries at the end of their productive cycles with new sources of wealth production has proven the most drastic source of economic trouble for Galveston. Yet many families have remained on the island of Galveston for generations. Lower income families remain despite a lack of economic opportunity, and higher income families, whose successive generations may have moved their physical residence, remain financially vested in the island. This loyalty is a surprise, if you consider how un-American it is to remain in a place despite an produce new wealth. Consider the ghost town of the Wild West or the abandoned mill town of the rust belt. It is more typically European or Mexican for a city to develop a culture despite a lack of economic growth. The difference between Galveston and the other American examples is a large group of benefactors who continually invest in the city. Galveston benefits, in this respect, by being part of the Houston region. Most of the wealthy Galvestonians who moved off the island remained in the region. Quick shocks, like the hurricane or radical economic depressions, or slower, sometimes more painful cycles, like shoreline erosion, or a shift in the economy from agriculture to tourism, have

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11 From Conversation with Steven Fox.
necessitated economic attention.\textsuperscript{12} A mixture of public and private investment has managed to respond to the turbulence dealt by the physical and economic conditions. From the beginning, investment has taken place in many forms on the island. The history of Galveston is the history of these efforts. Investment and re-investment, both large and small, mark the decades.

The Northwest quadrant of Galveston is the heart of the island city made up of the wharf activities centered around the port, the tourist activity of The Strand area, and the Old Central Neighborhood which is a low-income housing with a ghost of a commercial corridor. These three nodes of the northwest quadrant represent different phases of major investment in the city of Galveston. The investment prior to the redevelopment of The Strand strove to keep these three zones working together.

The Strand signals a new approach that takes a particular zone out of context and re-invents its role. This is a crucial change in the structure of Galveston. From this point on it no longer works as a self-supporting town. With this in mind, planners must now try and be realistic about the role each zone can play. Responding to the current conditions in the adjacent zones can be tricky,

\textsuperscript{12} McComb, p. 49
because the development can be so fickle, but an awareness is necessary to be practical. Repeating roles being performed by the other two zones is redundant. Looking at each zone from within will help to identify the strengths and weaknesses. Considering how these strengths and weaknesses fit within the Houston region as a whole as opposed to in Galveston as a closed set is necessary. The research reveals that these zones interconnect in many ways, but no longer feed each other as in the old cycle. These relationships can either be fostered or ignored. When ignored, the effectiveness of investing in one zone is decreased. However, when the connection between the areas is fostered, the benefits reaped from the investment is increased.

Urban “clean up” efforts of the 1970’s attempted to revitalize the low income neighborhoods by clearing what was seen as urban blight and infilling with civic infrastructure. Items usually reserved for remote locations, such as an energy transfer station and a bus depot, were plunked down in the midst of the working class minority neighborhood Market Street, west of 25th, which was the main commercial corridor of the segregated low-income black neighborhood. Today the street consists of municipal facilities on vast open
lots defined only by chain link boundaries, empty lots, and boarded up buildings. Two decades have passed since the last major efforts in this zone and as a result they exist in a state of decay today. What once were public housing projects full of inhabitants are boarded up and partially occupied awaiting yet another wave of investment. The rehabilitation scheme razed decrepit housing and commercial strips that appeared beyond help. With a clean slate, the urban renewal plan produced vast new housing areas without rebuilding new commercial spaces to provide services to this housing, or an economic base for jobs. These efforts aimed to improve the quality of life, but neglected the importance of jobs and social life in creating a vibrant community.

Today these open spaces within Old Central Neighborhood form a vast desert complete with ruins: the walls of old cotton warehouses. These warehouses, that used to provide jobs but today they remain only as a memory of the once vital area, are held as speculative land holdings by the Mitchell Corporation, developers of the Strand. Responsible development of this land could greatly benefit all involved if a role that benefits the entire region is taken into consideration. What would be the worst move would be to blindly ignore
the problems of the Old Central Neighborhood and just continuing to an extension of The Strand. The existing schism between the two would be worsened. The Strand caters to a middle class tourism-based income that has little to offer the low-income residents, providing neither jobs nor services. Future efforts at restoring the razed commercial along Market Street west of 25th St. will provide such services and jobs as well as providing a more appropriate transition from The Strand to its surroundings.

In order to induce the tourist to visit a specific area...Government and private enterprise not only redefine social reality but also recreate it to fit those definitions... to the extent that this process takes place, the category of everyday life is annihilated.\textsuperscript{13}

Therefore, if there is a way to re-connect The Strand area with the working classes of the city while maintaining the positive effects, it will be by encouraging development along the Market St. corridor. A more successful renovation of The Strand would benefit by a successful area, if for no other reason than the fact that accomplished. Social mechanisms could encourage further economic interaction, while public transportation links could physically connect the two. It should be noted that public transportation between The Strand and the beach and The Strand and Pier 21 has provided

\textsuperscript{13} p.177 Hall \textit{Tourism and Politics: Policy, Power and Place}
just such a link with the assistance of public funding. The way in which developers targeted and assessed this sector holds valuable lessons that should be kept in mind when assessing the other two zones.

Architecture without reinforcement from human investment programs is impotent. This is not to say that architecture cannot enhance life, yet one may ask what makes architecture socially potent? When answering this question one must limit the number of variables for it can be argued that housing is much easier to make work for a high income bracket than a low-income bracket. Compare the success rates of high rises among the rich to those in low-income neighborhoods. Successful semi-private spaces within the complexes have been recently cited as effective spaces.\textsuperscript{14} These are very abundant in older housing stocks in the form of porches. Yet in the larger complexes, the porch type of space where a chance meeting could occur are lacking. To their credit the plans called for court spaces and communal play areas; but the difference between these type of public spaces and the type of semi-private space fostered by the porch are obviously crucial. An analysis of the housing stock within the Old Central Neighborhood would be very

\textsuperscript{14} Kelvin Hall, Thesis, (Rice University, Houston, TX) 1995
beneficial at identifying the potential for sympathetically rehabilitating these neighborhoods.

The architectural community retreated from the problem of designing public housing as a response to the 1970s solution to solving urban crisis: design a new city focus that would compete with the suburbs for middle class discretionary money. Housing it is argued is best left for the individual to work out within the market place, while an inner city market place or a shopping center that could can compete with the forces of exurbia had to be designed. All of these arguments have great merit but again a key ingredient was missing -- the city’s inhabitants. Of course it was argued that the city population would benefit from influx of money and an increase tax base, but the census statistics bear out a net loss of jobs to the suburbs and real number of new jobs that flatlined after the initial transition to service oriented jobs.

Comparative Case Study: Baltimore, Maryland

Perhaps the most famous example is Baltimore’s inner harbor. For year’s hailed as the panacea for the inner-city urban woes, The redevelopment of the inner-harbor, has been re-investigated. For two decades, at a huge cost to the city, this privately developed central Strand ate up the city’s dwindling cash flow. It created a beautiful showplace for the city, especially beneficial to
the suburbanites who come to shop and spend the leisure time, yet the deep
rooted problems of the city remained.

The city re-shaped itself from a declining industrial town to a city of
tourism and services. Physical redevelopment however, did not
reverse the loss of steady, good-paying jobs, nor did it provide a secure
economic future for the city--Baltimore's most recent economic
development strategy, unveiled by the city's association, the Greater
Baltimore Council: "The Life sciences focus."... A marine biology
center requires everything from marine biologists, to maintenance
engineers, to accountants, to community education specialists, to
specially trained plumbers.\(^\text{15}\)

How does this discussion of Built environment investment verses the
Human Potential investment tie into the discussion of Galveston? As
mentioned in the introduction the city of Galveston depends heavily on
investment for survival. Especially today as the transition away from an
industrial economy continues and the real cost of having a disconnected
lowest-no income population continues to rise, the question becomes: Can
the city afford to invest in features that mainly benefit a higher income bracket
when a lower income bracket needs more attention? The attainment of minor
league recreational center is not enough to spontaneously charge the entire

\(^{15}\) p.41 Wagner, Jones, Humphrey, "Baltimore and the Human Investment Challenge." Urban Re-
Vitalization, Policies and Programs.
(Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA) 1995
economy of Galveston. Whether or not the maximum potential of this retail tourist economy has been reached is not yet answerable.

The problems of The Old Central neighborhood continue at the boiling point and need immediate attention. Any further development of The Strand Zone will in part depend on conditions improving in the adjacent area, so it behooves everyone to figure appropriate responses.
CONCLUSION

When a city undergoes a transition from an agro-industrial shipping base to a tourism base the relationship between workplace and neighborhood is challenged. The traditional urban planning question has been: How can life for the working class, who no longer have work within the city, be stitched back into the vibrancy of the city? Is it appropriate to try and stitch the city back together? Are there new ways of stitching?

Galveston has lost its economic autonomy and has become a component of the greater Houston region, where the reality is one of separate zones; not the old model of cohesive working city. Is this model viable for a zone like Galveston that has a dense fabric but a de-centralized operating system? Can a tourist based economy that needs a sterile perfect theme park environment survive adjacent to a defunct bombed out area of town?

The mechanics of the city do not necessarily manifest themselves in our built world. Being realistic about the current state of the city allows one to approach urban planning in an innovative way. Traditional city models no longer perform in a mechanical way, but that doesn’t mean that we cannot
benefit from a traditional fabric.

The traditional bureaucratic response of redeveloping the down and out sector of the city into a perfect residential environment is insanity it does not work. There is already a perfectly good building stock that could be rehabbed into a thriving neighborhood were the population of this area reconnected to society. Likewise the developer's dreamscape of successful shopping centers all across the zone would require the displacement of the population into low income pockets across the region, and just passes the buck.

Recognizing the new role Galveston plays as part of the Houston Region is the first step. Seeing that the downtown of Galveston is no longer providing public space for it inhabitant free from commercialism and prescribed activity, helps focus attention on the need for a space that offers these things. There are broad economic and political issues involved; and therefore, defining the scope of an architectural role for this zone as becomes the design project for this thesis investigation. Seeing the potential for such a space in the vacant land of the Old Central Neighborhood, this thesis takes stock of the existing conditions and develops a public landscape.
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