RICE UNIVERSITY

Hybrid PARK(ing): The Parking Structure as Urban Park
Exploring the Mediation Between
Infra-structure, Architecture & the Public

by

Marcus M. Farr

A THESIS SUBMITTED
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Master of Architecture

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Liminal Bodies:

Liminal Bodies are more than instruments of change; they are also users of the opportunities that an evolving environment gives. They are levers that regulate the force and energy of proto-urban conditions; they create new life forms, empower emergent ones. Liminal Bodies mutate from existing operational systems, or are created by actors and agents joined through conflict and negotiation.

-CHORA, URBAN FLOTSAM

This thesis seeks to identify a specific place within the urban landscape of Houston, Texas where a set of infra-structural connections and relationships within a "dead" or "under-utilized" site can be brought into focus, evaluated, and reintroduced to the city as a catalyst for the betterment of urban society and how we, as a public, interact with it. It will aim for the creation of enabling urban fields that accommodate processes that may or may not be expressed in physical form, subsequently the site will become fused and engaged, rather than separated, creating hybrid conditions and entities.

Using landscape-urbanism and architecture, a hybrid condition can be established where the segregated city sites created by infrastructures can be blurred successfully with the public and pedestrian domain. This union has the potential to transform dying city spaces into vibrant, thriving promenades and public domains.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Hybrid (ing): The Parking Structure as Urban Park

: Exploring the Mediation Between
Infra-structure, Architecture & the Public
Urban Transition: Parking Structure as Urban Activator (Liminal Bodies)
: exploring the mediation between infrastructure, architecture & the public

Rice University School of Architecture

THESIS CONCERNS:

Initial Explorations

1. Urban streets, Bayous, Metro Lines; what happens architecturally when these systems collide?
2. The development of Open Sites created by infrastructure and circulation lines within an urban condition

Initial Questions

1. Question the co-habitation of people, traffic, streets, transportation, urban circulation, work, living.
2. Question the contribution of architecture to the public realm of the city where a site is heavily influenced by urban infra-structural systems.
3. Is the area within this domain under-utilized? Why?
4. Does cultivating this domain create a more unique urban experience?
5. What is the potential architecturally/urbanistically in a site composed by complex systems of flow, interchange, movement, circulation.

"In the coming decades a new type of building will go up everywhere; a roofed over amalgam of trains, busses, offices, parking garages, and shops, situated on large plots in or near historic town centers. This is a totally new typology for the disciplines of architecture, urbanism, and vvinfrastucture. The new building for the urban transportation area addresses all three of these fields and requires an integral approach."

van Berkel / Bos

Theoretical Support:

Part of what we experience in our everyday life consists of and edges where several systems come together, intertwining or weaving in and out of each other before moving on to another destination. Our everyday experience is very much a part of the residual space left in the wake of these edges and collisions. Impenetrable barriers, gaps, and overlaps create awkward juxtapositions and form the familiar metropolitan landscape we work and live in. By default we are left with these "in-between spaces", and within these spaces - questions and potential. These areas are a result of infrastructure and other city projects seeking to solidify convenience and speed instead of cohesion in the urban and public field. This interstitial no-mans-land is also a result of widespread disappearance of a familiar civic identity from the physical urban condition. What is left is a landscape no longer contributing to the betterment of the urban community.

Urban Systems Impact Infrastructure
1.) Urban Roadways
2.) The Bayou
3.) Metropolitan Rail System

These systems of the city permeate our everyday life and allow us to move through and around the city. Train lines, metro-transportation & light rails, highways, freeways, interstate exchanges, rivers and bayous; these are all systems that live, thrive, and create boundaries in our urban environment. They meet, collide, and cut the city into sections.

The separation of infrastructure and public and community life is a question that these boundaries are constantly enforcing and questioning.

The allure of the public territory created by our urban infrastructure lies in the potential of the marginalized sites they frequently occupy, as potential contributions to the public realm.

These systems do not just divide the city into certain areas, but also become spaces where uncertainties meet, interact.
If architecture searches for new modes and new typologies from within these boundary areas themselves, then it can possibly become an instrument and a catalyst for civic transformations which are struggling today to occur.

These boundaries and borderlines are also paired and in part created by politics, socio-economic policies and conditions, cultural threads and segregations running throughout the fabric of the metropolis, and the blurring of our emotional connection with city. Using landscape design & urbanism, architecture, and environmental installation, a hybrid condition can be established where the segregated city sites created by the boundaries can be blurred successfully with the public and pedestrian domain. This union has the potential to transform dying city spaces into vibrant, thriving neighborhoods and public domains.

As social creatures in the contemporary city, we live our lives within spatial zones bounded by natural and artificial boundaries. These boundaries affect our identity as a community, what we do in our day-to-day lives, and how we interact with the metropolis.

Albert Pope: "It is necessary to identify and define an actual subject- a site for theoretical suppositions. Apart from the sheer brutality of the urban environment its complete rejection of the pedestrian subject the contemporary city represents the complete collapse of the social. It is conceivable that architecture, in its remaining capacity to inscribe the subject, now becomes a potentially liberating agent."

One method of investigation along this path of logic would be to study and identify a precise place where a set of connections and relationships within the site could be brought into focus. This thesis seeks to identify a specific place within the urban landscape of Houston where the boundaries of the city come together and form an exciting, un-explored site where design can be introduced as a catalyst for the critique and betterment of our city and how we interact with it. The relationship between these boundaries and the urban landscape offers a window of exploration and the potential to learn something new about how design can somehow create a cohesion in our fragmented urban fabric. These areas of study offer an elaboration of the areas around the city's infrastructure and bayous and the possibility for a more vigorous urban landscape. This thesis is an effort to find an architecture that engages & reconfigures the residual spaces and pockets leftover by the development of our urban world. If there is to be a "new urbanism" it will no longer be concerned with the arrangement of permanent objects but rather with the cultivation of territories with potential. It will aim for the creation of enabling urban fields that accommodate processes that may or may not be expressed in physical form. The boundary will become fused and engaged, rather than separated, creating hybrid conditions and entities.

The superimposing of architectural elements has the potential to enable connections between existing elements where a design could link disjointed sites, architecture, pedestrian platforms, and urban transportation and circulation, and consequently maximize potential connections between the pedestrian and the city.

The strategy could open the no-mans-land into a zone between urban edges, offering a space in which the "various groups" meet and co-exist.

1Organizational logics that inform the way certain elements of the metropolis are generated.
Initial Readings:

Mutations: Harvard Project on the City
S.M.L.XL, Rem Koolhaas, Bruce Mau
After the City, Lars Lerup
Site Specific: Weiss Manfredi Architects
Steven Holl Architect, Kenneth Frampton
Points + Lines, Diagrams and Projects for the City, Stan Allen
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-Stanley Saitowitz Mill Race Park Structures
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Borderline
-Manuel De Landa Extensive Borderlines & Intensive Borderlines
-Lebbeus Woods Inside The Borderline
Trans-Urbanism

Urban Cartographies
Mill Race Park Structures: Stanley Saitowitz
Move van Berkel / Bos
Negotiate My Boundary RAMTV
intro: parking structures
Research Photograph:
Concrete Parking Structure, Interior
Research Photograph:
Parking Structure
Research Photograph:
European Parking Structure, Interior

Research Photograph:
Concrete Pavement (farr)
Research Photograph:
Urban Parking Structure, American

Research Photographs:
American Parking Structures
Research Diagram: Parking Structure Forms & Circulation (farr)

Note: Helixes provide paths of flow and floor-to-floor circulation for parking structures.

When only two parking bays are provided, a single-threaded helix must have one-way traffic, double-threaded helixes provide the ability for one-way or two-way flow.
Research Diagram: Parking Structure Forms & Circulation (farr)

NOTE:
Wayfinding—the ability to understand where you are, where you want to go in a building and then recollect the path of travel when leaving.
02 urban context
Downtown Houston, Texas
Current Metropolitan Locales

Infrastructural Possibilities

Trafficways

Metrorail

Bayou

Urban Research Diagrams: Existing Factors Affecting Downtown Houston;
1.) Metropolitan Light Rail System
2.) Bayou Water Control, Drainage, Flooding
3.) Urban Streets Feeding The City & Interstate (farr)
Downtown Houston, Texas

Area of Interest

The addition of the MetroRail increases the amount of activity and the possibility of increased cohesion between the disparate sites along the bayou and the edge of the city.

The rail bypasses the areas where important rejuvenation efforts are in place.

The convergence of Buffalo and White Oak Bayous. The addition of north and south canals for bayou flood management allows for a more stable site for future development.

Traffic convergences at Commerce & Main. One-way streets became two-way.

As traffic leaves the implied boundary downtown, the multifunctional activity of cars creates a situation where the site can begin to establish a stronger connection with the city.
Sixteen Existing Gravel Surface Lots Provide Parking For Current Local Commuting Demands. While These Surface Lots Create An Urban Environment That Is In Frequent Use And Demand By Commuters, It Remains Aesthetically Undesirable. The Nature And Placement Of The Lots Is Disparate And Scattered, Providing Little Order And No Cohesion Within The Primary Circulation And Usage Patterns.

A Vulnerable Edge Of The City Becomes Apparent As It Seeps Into The No Man's Land Of The Underdeveloped Bayou. Businesses Yield To Parking Structures And Vacant Concrete Lots.
Research Diagram: Project Site Demographics (far)

**Existing Conditions**

- Federal Building
- Main Street Bridge
- Buffalo Bayou
- Existing Dead End
- Travis Street Bridge
- Main Street Bridge Underpass
- Main Street & Railline
- New Uni Academic Building

**Opportunities**

- Create Relationship With Rail Line And Establish Pedestrian Flow
- Create A Window To Existing Park (opposite Bridge), & Allow For Increased Pedestrian Movement And Waterfront Utilization
- Use Existing Dead End From Downtown As Boatslip/water-front Access
- Further Develop Main Street Underpass For Pedestrian Flow & Public Usage
.03 urban theory
demography
the building as a diagram
"In the coming decades a new type of building will go up everywhere; a roofed over amalgam of trains, busses, offices, parking garages, and shops, situated on large plots in or near historic town centers. This is a totally new typology for the disciplines of architecture, urbanism, and infrastructure. The new building for the urban transportation area addresses all three of these fields and requires an integral approach."

Ben Van Berkel
The Background Of Chora And Liminal Bodies Theory

From the book *Urban Flotsam: Stirring the City* by The CHORA research group and Raoul Bunschoten we know that there are specific methods of working and seeing, regarding urban change and form, these can inform design strategies and shape the outline for urban projects and speculations, in particular the following 4 tell us how to "SEE", how to "PLAY", how to "TELL", and how to "ACT".

1.) Proto-Urban Conditions
2.) Dynamic Modelling
3.) Taxonomy and Unfolding
4.) Liminal Bodies

CHORA-

A city of great changes, Istanbul. It started out as the Greek city Byzantium; then as Constantinople it became the Byzantine capital, the second Rome, and, after that, capital of the Ottoman Empire; it is now Turkey’s economic and political hotbed. Located astride Europe and Asia, it links two continents and their various cultures, the Balkans with the Middle East, the Mediterranean with the Black Sea. It is a city of many layers, a pulsating palimpsest.

Part of this palimpsest is the Kariye Djami. Now a museum, formerly a mosque, and before that the church of chora. The word chora, recent focus of many renewed debates and interpretations, appears within the entrance space above the inner doorway. In the Kariye Djami it indicates something like a field for the living, a field that links two realms, a threshold space between local and larger, global conditions. In addition to the Neo-Platonic interpretation, the word includes notions such as a matrix, a kind of womb, the enfolding of an outside world into specific body. A Greek word for city, chora came to indicate peripheral and liminal conditions. Peripheral spaces were portals to larger and different spaces where, in the early Greek period, sanctuaries were placed and rituals held. In this way the mundane affairs of daily life were linked to larger spaces inhabited by gods with human propensities (they embodied forces otherwise too large to comprehend). Similarly, the portals in contemporary cities that negotiate between different layers of urban spatiality, such as the Internet, global financial & labour markets and new forms of cultural production. Portals generate spaces and events on the edge, on a cusp in time, almost not there, ephemeral like a dance, but influencing all that moves - vortices in a landscape of urban change.

*Urban Flotsam: Stirring the City*
Time & Activity Around Site - Transportation & Pedestrian

Automotive Traffic • \text{variable} \quad \text{higher concentrations of activity in rush hours}

Pedestrian Traffic \bigcirc \quad \text{variable} \quad \text{higher concentrations of activity in rush hours and lunch hours}

Metro Lightrail • \quad \text{constant} \quad \text{every six minutes in peak time, every 12 minutes in off peak hours}

Metro Buses • \quad \text{constant} \quad \text{every 15 minutes}

free Metro Trolley Rt. N
\quad \text{constant} \quad \text{Monday - Friday 6:30 am - 7:30 pm, every 12 minutes}

free Metro Trolley Rt. D \quad \text{constant} \quad \text{Monday - Friday 7:30 pm - 10:30 pm, every 15 minutes}
\text{Saturday 5 pm - 10:30 pm, every 15 minutes}
Projected Time & Activity Around Site - Social Programming
Projected Time & Activity-Social Programming Overlap

Projected vs. Existing
The skin of the earth wraps the earth. Cities form the second skin.

The skin of the earth consists of layers with various properties: constant flux, unpredictable behavior, inexhaustible diversity, and incessant rise of new features. The skin of the earth is where we live. The world is a viscous body with a thin crust; this crust forms the physical ground in our lives. We live in it, on it, and rarely far away from it. Architecture is a partly indicative, partly mimetic expression of our relationship with this skin and the mental modes we make of that relationship. The form of this expression ranges from that of a surgical operation upon the skin to a substitution for this skin. The edge of the skin is the horizon.

(A+U, no. 263, August 1992)
Liminal Bodies = Change In Form & Thrive Upon Urban Change

Liminal Bodies are urban entities that emerge out of environments undergoing radical change &/or conflict.

The term "liminal" describes the threshold between a submerged condition and an emerging or institutionalized condition of an urban entity but also the threshold between different parties and their beliefs locked together in a confined urban space.

It is a condition in between two states of being, an interstructural space, possibly a public space, a space where different urban actors interact and negotiate through this space. They are submerged entities that nevertheless draw a sign upon the urban surface, institutions about to form. They can be buildings, open spaces, geographic features, and in urban contexts they are in some way institutionalized.

These spaces, or buildings, operate as urban devices that are urgently required in chaotic and fast growing cities to give external identity to an urban environment and its interactions.

Liminal Bodies regulate flow in dynamic societies and link radically different actors to each other.

The Liminal Body may be orchestrated as a single, autonomous, architectural body.

-Urban Plotsam
.04 concept/connecting
"It is necessary to identify and define an actual subject— a site for theoretical suppositions. Apart from the sheer brutality of the urban environment its complete rejection of the pedestrian subject the contemporary city represents the complete collapse of the social. It is conceivable that architecture, in its remaining capacity to inscribe the subject, now becomes a potentially liberating agent."

Albert Pope
Conceptual Connectivity Linking Potential Urban Relationships
Around, Through, and Within The Site
Potential Architecture:
Section of building with social programming and diagrammatical demographic in context with existing conditions.
See Section @ Bridge Span

1.0 Typical Transverse Section @ Bridge Span
0 concept—utilize the intuitions of the building as informed by the social programming diagrams; place and shape the building with its multiple urban uses of parking structure, urban center, student center, etc., and modify the form of the building so that it fits perfectly into the existing site and the Main Street bridge.
1 placement

2 shaping

Reversing the existing green space so that it becomes a more active force in the existence of the architecture; green moves from the banks of the bayou and infiltrates the surfaces of the building.
3 zoning - cars vs. other

4 identification - access points from bridge and entrances
5 circulation-
generation of circulation
patterns thru structure

Cars and office space are
close in proximity, allowing
for ease of access for work
and meeting

Optimum viewing height.
05 hybridization
The thesis takes on its actual form by combining the (1.) 'building as a diagram' and it's relating demographic of social program and existing social situation, (2.) the informational diagrams suggesting the relationships between the Main Street Bridge, placement on the site, & the building as a tool of urban use and rejuvenation, (documenting flow, circulation, etc.) and (3.) the parking slab system which allows for the most adaptability, efficiency of circulation & navigation, and usage within the suggested urban condition, and lastly (4.) the reversal of the site so that the natural green elements of the site and bayou infiltrate the surfaces of the building to create urban park areas available for new uses.

The parking slab allows for the cohabitation of commercial and automotive real estate, while still maintaining an extremely flexible mode of circulation throughout the structure.
slab to slab parking studies
slab to slab parking studies
Site Plan

- University Of Houston-Downtown, 8,712 Students (4,300 Full-time, 4,512 Part-time)
- First Last Stop Of New 7.5 Mile Lightrail System
  Designed To Replace 1,200 Daily Bus Trips Through
  The Main Street Corridor
- Johnny Guerra Park
- Malmesbury - Projected To Spur $1 Billion In Main Street
  Economic Development With Annual Boardings Of
  40,000 Per Weekday
  - Stops Every 6 Minutes In Peak Hours
  - Every 12 Minutes In Off Peak

- Buffalo Bayou: A Multi-faceted Master Plan is in Effect and
  Fully Integrates The Integration Of Conservation And Urban Development.
  The Master Plan For The Bayou is Intended To Create A Re-vitalized
  Urban Waterfront, Improved Environmental And Water Quality, Flood
  Management, Landscape Design, And Water Based Activities.
- Allen's Landing: A City Landmark And Houston's First Port
  And Publicly Declared Historic. Designs Are Currently In Place For
  A Visitors Center, Restaurant, Waterfront Access And Offices.
- Main Street Corridor: The Key Artery Linking Downtown
  Houston To Midtown, The Third Ward, The Texas Medical Center;
  Three Major Universities, The Museum District, Herman Park,
  And Reliant Stadium
- Buffalo Lakes: A 107 unit loft conversion building, renting
  for residential downtown living or office space.
- A new 34,000 sq ft classroom building for UH-Downtown;
  used for Criminal Justice and Urban Education departments.
  Contains 35 classrooms, computer instruction labs, & faculty
  offices; Also designed as part of the Cottswald Project - an effort
  to rejuvenate downtown streets with fountains, landscaping,
  lighting, and sidewalk improvement.

New Structure To Be Plugged Into Site
Consolidate Existing Surface Lots Into New Structure W/Multiple Uses

Existing Surface Lots

Sixteen Existing Gravel Surface Lots Provide Parking For Current Local Commuting Demands. While These Surface Lots Create An Urban Environment That Is In Frequent Use And Demand By Commuters, It Remains Aesthetically Undesirable. The Nature And Placement Of The Lots Is Disparate And Scattered, Providing Little Order And No Cohesion Within The Primary Circulation And Usage Patterns.
Primary Circulation Paths for UH Students

The circulation of student pedestrian movement acts as the main generator for the stirring of people around the site. The movement is a result of people going back and forth to classes in university buildings, as well as the usual movement of going and coming, leaving and arriving, eating, breaking, and meeting people for business and social reasons. The buildings strategy is to intercept and accommodate the public while they are moving around the urban site by acting as a parking dock, thus a commuting dock, giving over its roof surfaces to urban greenspace and within it, a student center.
University of Houston-Downtown, 8712 Students (4200 Full-time, 4512 Part-time)

First/Last Stop Of New 7.5 Mile Light Rail System
Designed To Replace 1,200 Daily Bus Trips Through The Main Street Corridor

Johnny Goyen Park

Metrorail - Projected To Spur $1 Billion in Main Street Economic Development With Annual Boardings Of 60,000 Per Weekday
- Stops Every 6 Minutes In Peak Hours
  Every 12 Minutes In Off-Peak

Buffalo Bayou - A Multi-faceted Master Plan Is In Effect and Involved The Integration Of Conservation And Urban Development. The Master Plan For The Bayou Is Intended To Create A Re-vitalized Urban Waterfront, Improved Environmental And Water Quality, Flood Management, Landscape Design, And Water Based Activities.

Allen's Landing - A City Landmark And Houston's First Port And Publicly Declared Birthplace. Designs Are Currently In Place For A Visitors Center, Restaurant, Waterfront Access And Offices.

Main Street Corridor Is The Key Artery Linking Downtown Houston To Midtown, The Third Ward, The Texas Medical Center, Three Major Universities, The Museum District, Hermann Park, And Reliant Stadium

Bayou Lofts - A 107 unit loft conversion building, renting for residential downtown living or office space

A new 90,000 sq ft classroom building for UH-Downtown, used for Criminal Justice and Urban Education departments, Contains 25 classrooms, computer instruction labs, & faculty offices; Also designed as part of the Cottrell Project - an effort to rejuvenate downtown streets with fountains, landscaping, lighting, and sidewalk improvement.
Circulation from sidewalk allows for the building roof to act as an extension of the sidewalk and becomes a usable perk-like surface for pedestrians as well as a "step-down" circulatory transition to the street.
Circulation From Sidewalk
Allows For The Building Roof To
Act As An Extension Of The Sidewalk
And Becomes A Useable Park-like
Surface For Pedestrians As Well As A
"step-down" Circulational Transition
From The Bridge To Commerce Street

**Cycle of movement**

**Commerce Street Elevation**

**Bayou Elevation**
1b Floodwater Levels

structure creates levee conditions for rising water and elevates useable commercial zones

1a Greenspace
Spatial Zoning & Usage: Commercial/Cafe/ Commons Spaces, Parking, Green Space, Main Street Traffic Over Bridge
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Publisher: Goose Press, (June 1999)

(All Text on pgs. 19, 23, 25
from Urban Flotsam unless otherwise noted)
to and for Mom, Thanks for everything....