Post Game: Reappropriating America's Jettisoned Stadia

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Abstract

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The politics and economics of professional sports in the U.S. have managed to shorten the effective lifespan of stadia to that of a wood frame house.

The multi-purpose stadium in particular has come to be targeted for eradication as team owners coerce cities into building single-use facilities and forcing their predecessors into obsolescence. This is largely done with municipal funds, and at a time when spending on all other infrastructure languishes.

These are publicly-owned facilities that have historically served as great social condensers in their often suburban settings.

These stadiums have demonstrated flexibility far beyond their original goals. They have also become points of reference for their respective cities. To many they represent those cities. Their demolition is largely a function of skewed economies and narrow valuation.

The adaptive re-use of these stadia is the key to re-activating their urban function and changing the way we value them.
Thanks to Doug for staying on me and to Ann Marie for sticking with me
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Reappropriating America's Jettisoned Stadia
Maybe you haven't noticed, but America has developed a stadium habit. By that I'm referring to our voracious consumption of stadia. In the last ten years alone we've seen the demolition of at least fourteen major league stadiums with new ones built in their place, often more than one based on new trends. The average age of these facilities is 30 years old. They represent billions of dollars in public investment, and most of them are still being paid for. Suffice it to say these things aren't dying of old age.
Since 1997 the U.S. has seen fourteen major league stadiums, the largest and most costly type, demolished and new ones built in their place.
The average age of the facilities being replaced is 30 years. They represent a public investment of $5.4 billion. Most of them are still being paid for.
It is the politics and economics of professional sports in the US that have managed to shorten the effective lifespan of these stadia to that of a wood frame house. These are publicly owned facilities, civic buildings in a sense, that have historically served as the great social condensers in their respective cities. However, they have become tethered to the large-scale, single-use pattern. It is my contention that the adaptive re-use of these stadia is the key to restoring their urban function.
The politics and economics of professional sports in the U.S. have managed to shorten the effective lifespan of stadia to that of a single-family house. These are publicly-owned facilities that have historically served as great social condensers in their often suburban settings. The adaptive re-use of these stadia is the key to re-activating their urban function.
Many of these stadia find themselves prematurely vacated due to the migratory nature of professional teams.
The multi-purpose stadium is a particular type designed and built to accommodate several different sports. RFK stadium, built in Washington, D.C. in 1961, was the first of this type in the US. For the next 20 years the multi-purpose model constituted the vast majority of stadia built.

They are also the most likely to be razed and replaced by single-use facilities at the behest of team owners.
Left to right: Buch Stadium, St. Louis, Kingdome, Seattle, Veterans Stadium, Philadelphia, Dolphins Stadium, Miami, Riverfront Stadium, Cincinnati, McAfee Coliseum, Oakland, Fulton County Stadium, Atlanta, Three Rivers Stadium, Pittsburgh, Qualcomm Stadium, San Diego, RFK Stadium, Washington, D.C. Shea Stadium, New York, Astrodome, Houston.
The multipurpose type is often found at some distance from the city's center. This was a function of suburban growth and subsequent decline in the urban core. This isolation is compounded by the vast parking lots which surround the stadia.
Like many new facilities, Reliant Stadium negotiated a non-compete clause with the city of Houston, ensuring that no other venue in the area could compete with it to host sports and entertainment events.

This ban would include its neighbor, the Astrodome. As a result the dome now sits vacant for most of the year, coming into service only as a provisional facility.
This is how events were typically staged. Performance occurs in the central space with spectators on the periphery. If the function filled the field then all the better. The space was on size fits all, a euphemism for extra-large.
But if you look into some of the more opportunis-
tic ways that stadia have been used you start to
see a different pattern. Either the main event is
displaced from the center or there is simply no
main event at all but a function. These uses start
to operate at smaller scales within the stadium.
This is relevant in that we have to assume that
these abandoned facilities will no longer host the
very large events for which they were intended.
Traditionally Multipurpose stadia host events consecutively. This is how the Astrodome has been historically used. What I propose is to introduce a menu of smaller functions which can happen concurrently.
Astrodome Annual Use: 2000-Present

Livestock
trade exhibits
hurricane shelter
livestock exhibit
cargo handling
horse stables
park space
agriculture lab
bus pick-up/drop-off

commissions

APR
MAY
JUN
JUL
AUG
SEP
OCT
NOV
DEC
FEB
MAR
In the absence of the single, large-scale events, the central space needs to be rethought.
200,000 sf playing surface

1,000 evacuee beds
350,000 sf exhibit space
175,000 sf agriculture
350,000 sf convention space
12 bus gates
64 cargo bays

200 horse stables
200,000 sf exhibit space
40,000 sf convention space
60,000 sf park space
12 bus gates
64 cargo bays

300,000 sf livestock space
500 horse stables
70,000 sf agriculture
100,000 sf convention space
12 bus gates
64 cargo bays

350,000 sf exhibit space
50,000 sf park space
12 bus gates
64 cargo bays

12,000 evacuee beds
350,000 sf exhibit space
200 horse stables
70,000 sf park space
12 bus gates
64 cargo bays

baseball / football / concerts
livelock exhibit
agriculture lab
conventions
trade exhibits
park space
hurricane shelter
cargo handling
horse stables
bus pick-up/drop-off
The idea is to develop a modular building system that can be deployed within the large interior spaces of these disused stadiums. The system has been conceived with the multi-purpose stadiums in mind due to their more immediate availability (i.e., imminent destruction). As a distinct type these stadia share a number of features. The most obvious is their strict rotational symmetry (most are in fact perfect circles in plan). This symmetry establishes fairly standard overhangs and structural bays. The first step would of course be to select a stadium from the growing number of candidates. At this point the stadiums features will be culled, discarding features which can no longer assist in the use of the space. In the case of the Astrodome this will include the removal of the field-level stands (those closest to the field) as well as all actual seats, leaving the concrete risers. The aisles interspersed among these risers will provide access to the new functions. Amendments to the roof will be made as well, namely replacing the painted skylights (an accommodation to baseball players) with more transparent panels.

At the stadium's periphery will be situated the more intensive functions (washrooms, showers, food preparation) as well as the majority of circulation. The existing ramps and escalators will be utilized. Opaque divisions to the exterior will be selectively removed in order to employ day-lighting in the periphery's relatively slender cross section.
cores are built and assembled in sections, allowing for modulation of height.

The building system envisioned to tap into the stadium basically consists of two elements, one fixed and one flexible. First an array of fixed vertical cores will be established across the central space in order to provide structure and services to the interior. From these will be hung a series of flooring modules whose height and extent can be varied based on need. These are secured to the cores in a cable-stayed fashion.
modular system connection to periphery

primary line of circulation

peripheral spaces housing support functions
park/observation deck

evacuee sheltering

horse stabling

exhibit floor
While this proposal is dealing with a domed stadium I can certainly envision the modular system including a system of enclosure to be used with outdoor stadia.

Ultimately the goal is to develop a means of changing this multi-purpose type from within and thus reactivate these spaces. After all they are tremendous pieces of public infrastructure with plenty of life left in them.
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- As regards social condensers and the spectacle


- discussion of the historical relationship program has had with design


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- on the relationship between given forms and programatic activities