IN PLAIN SITE: SCRIPTING VALUE IN AN URBAN TERRAIN VAGUE

BY

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THESIS

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This thesis explores a system of usage and valuation for a 64 acre tract of privately owned land along the Chicago River, immediately south of downtown Chicago. Though slotted for development, the land has gone relatively untouched as a former railyard and exists as a terrain vague, outside the consciousness of the city’s residents. Central to this system is the role of the designer from the developments inception. A design of scripted activation is proposed to confront constituents with a unique urban landscape while sparking the process of development in the interest of the owner. The design engages a tiered system of interactions beginning with elements of spectacle followed by incursion, programming, and responsive landscapes as development begins. This script of land uses is designed to unfold in conjunction with phased development with the ultimate goal of impacting the final design of the proposed project. This project aims to test a new role for landscape architects at the beginning of a development and the ability of designers to broker value for marginalized landscapes.
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Table of Contents

1. Research Overview .........................................................................................................1
2. Topical Background .......................................................................................................5
3. Precedent Review .........................................................................................................10
4. Literature Review .......................................................................................................17
5. Site Investigation .........................................................................................................22
6. Design Process .............................................................................................................34
7. Conclusion .....................................................................................................................45
8. Citations .......................................................................................................................47
1. Research Overview

Introduction

The city is a script. Laws, courtesy and civic signals control the life of an urbanite, and in many cases the script is overly simple, distilling the complexity of the city into a tried and true formula. One lives in places where people live, one moves on the roads that link places and one works in places where work is done. The remaining time is spent in places with grass, trees and garbage cans. And, if there is a place one does not know of personally, this script can be assumed to play out there as well. When confronted with a piece of land that is “empty” the script dictates that, with all of the people living working or going, it must be “becoming something.” The script must be rewritten. When confronted with a fallow landscape, the urban dweller must understand its inherent value as a activated landscape in order to add a new line to the code of urban development. This thesis explores the possibility of incorporating marginal spaces into the script of the city. When confronted with a fallow landscape, the urban-dweller must understand its inherent value as a activated landscape in order to add a new line to the code of urban development. When land is so valuable only condominiums can generate adequate revenue for the developer and the city, the project can stall without the momentum of interest and capital. This new script can provide an alternative to the unused land, an amenity to the public, an impetus to development, and a new urban negotiation. Ultimately, the potential of this land will be realized more fully. Perhaps completely. The form of the final development may be a complete condo condition, though this new script might awaken a different outcome for these marginal spaces. The maximized value may include open lands, more valuable than a residential high rise. Or it could simply mean a more demanding citizen, versed in the urban fabric, who assigns marginal lands squarely within the pages of the urban script.
Situation

Chicago, and many other large cities, are simultaneously experiencing a shrinking of their industrial armature. The lands that were once productive are being transformed into residences, parks, and a new hybrid of production and service in the city (Reed 2008). This transformation is not a smooth one, the former industrial lands often sit in limbo before development is undertaken. Currently in Chicago, post industrial landscapes, residual infrastructures and the reshaped public housing initiatives have left large tracts of land vacant throughout the city. Where developers would normally capitalizes on these newly open lands, the lack of investment, demand or municipal support strands these vacancies (Corfman, 2009). The sheer value of the land creates immense inertia: Lands are so valuable/expensive that the only plausible return on the investment relies on the development of condominiums. If there is the public impulse for condos, these lands are developed, without that impulse, they become stranded, often fenced off from flows of the urban citizen.

Motive

This investigation attempt to apply these vacant spaces with an impulse of usage. The benefit is to the constituents of that area, and also falls within the developers interest. Given the recent economic climate, these spaces may be vacant for many more years. Where the developer is paying taxes and losing on the investment though gaining enormously from the increase in value, the people who could experiences these spaces are being excluded from a unique urban landscape, and a new vector in the script of the city. The central concepts to this thesis deal with the definition of value in an urban landscape. Value can be considered as an asset and as a tenant of the larger society. The urban terrains vagues are an asset to the owners of the property but also an asset to the people who encounter them and potentially use the space (Rubio 1995). As a tenant, these spaces are un-valued and this project aims to reverse that. The developer’s fence also is a condition of value, identifying the public as detractors to the value. This relationship can be reconsidered as a symbiosis, where civic value and monetary value are mutually reinforcing. Ultimately these ends of the spectrum might be considered as one in the same.
**Research Question**

This thesis attempts to devise a plan to address the conditions of an urban terrain vague. It identifies a vacant landscape in Chicago to test a regime of activation for fallow, privately owned parcels in the city. Essentially, the thesis explores the a new method for how a landscape designer can enter a project prior to development, rather than during the final planning stages, and it posits that the interventions of the nascent stages of a project will positively affect the final design.

**Research Strategy**

This thesis compares the conditions of a vacant parcel in Chicago, intended for development, and the potential of a that if activated with public programming. Research included an analysis of alternative urban programming, the composition of Chicago’s infrastructure, the conditions the Chicago’s real estate and the history of the site and greater Chicago River. From this investigation, a design is proposed as an alternative to the planned, conventional development project. Public designs of the development were used to approximate the forms of development that are envisioned by the developer and city. The design offers a possible template for similar vacancy conditions in Chicago or other urban areas.

**Hypothesis**

The thesis hypothesizes that the landscape designer has the ability to catalyze development of a stagnated vacant parcel south of Chicago’s loop, coinciding with the interests of the developer, and potentially shifting the final design to embrace the existing terrain vague.
Figure 1  SITE ORIENTATION
Google Earth

Figure 2  PRE-SETTLEMENT RIVER FORM
Citizen's Committee on River Straightening. 1926.

Figure 3  LUMBER YARDS LOOKING NORTH  http://encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/767.html

Figure 4  CHICAGO RIVER 1927
http://burnhamplan100.lit.uchicago.edu/multimedia/image_gallery/category/Historic+Images/

Figure 5  CHICAGO RIVER STRAIGHTENING 1929
http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/300008.html
2. Topical Background

Situation

At the height of the Chicago’s South Loop housing boom in 2005, the writers at Heartland Business Real Estate claimed the city is in a fight for its life. The suburbs continue to attract residents with single-family homes, recreation opportunities, and proximity to retail and supermarkets (Fishman, 2005). This is the Jetsonian dream realized, but the developers have hatched a plan to bring all of the comforts of the suburbs to the city. On the western border Chicago’s South Loop neighborhood, there is an 64 acre site ripe for development. The Riverside Park Development will offer 4600 residential units ranging from high-rise condos to town homes, retail, dining, and nightlife (Fishman, 2005). As the housing market collapsed, however, the development was delayed and the land has changed hands several times in the past years. The plans and renderings depict an architectural and urban default, but they stand as a testament to the speculation and exploitation that has been at the root of Chicago’s development from its birth. The land that they remain intent on developing was born from the same optimism for market share that drives today’s development. Just as the residential development petered out, the industrial forces that created the Riverside parcel in the early 1940’s dwindled as well (Hill, 2000). The site is has been shaped by the economic forecast for nearly the entire history of the city, and it is perhaps shrewd to consider this in order to present a more comprehensive vision for the land in the future.

Orientation

The site for the Riverside District development is located between Clark St. on the east edge and the Chicago River along its west. Roosevelt Rd. creates the northern boundary and 18th St. forms the southern edge. The Parcel is six blocks from the Willis Tower (formerly Sears Tower) and is visible from the observation deck. Seen from the vantage of the Willis Tower Observation Deck, it appears as though the surrounding infrastructure detours around the parcel. In reality, the roads and rail lines were laid in relation to the historic curve in the river. The parcel was created from a river-straightening project from
1927-1930 in response to Federal adoption of the Illinois & Michigan Canal. The land that is seemingly avoided by the South Loop infrastructure and industry is actually a locus of the larger narrative of Chicago’s rise.

River and Waterways

The Illinois and Michigan Canal opened in 1848 linking the harbors of Lake Michigan to the Mississippi River via the Illinois River. Agricultural production north of St Louis was now able to flow directly to Chicago for shipment through the Great Lakes to the eastern markets. Likewise, Eastern goods or materials processed in Chicago could now flow out Chicago’s ever expanding hinterland (Cronon, 1991). This was shadowed by the development of rail lines, with the Galena Railway being the first to open in the early 1850’s. By 1852 massive quantities of wheat and other commodities were being shipped by rail (Cronon, 1991). The duo of rail and water shipping catapulted Chicago into becoming the mercantile powerhouse of the Midwest. Products moving east could be shipped by rail to optimize speed, or products such as grain could cheaply be shipped through the Great lakes waterways. The relative ease of creating networks of rail lines allowed rail transport to eclipse the canals. Considering the tonnage of freight distributed between rail and waterway, as early as the late 1850’s, the I &M canal was doomed to obsolescence (Cronon, 1991).

Naturally, Chicago’s boosters would scoff at such a prediction. In their eyes, the I & M Canal was completely viable through the 1920’s. The completion of the “Deep Waterway” would connect Chicago to the Gulf of Mexico and fuel Chicago’s commercial engine (Hill, 2000). Water passage was operational since 1848, but the boosters lobbied for a waterway that could accommodate the heaviest barges, simplifying the shipping process. The bend in the South Branch of the Chicago River posed a problem. On a map from 1812 the bend is pronounced as a formidable feature (fig 6). From the standpoint of navigation, the bend required more maneuverable vessels and increased costs for shipments to and from Chicago’s harbor. The bend also created a tangle of streets and rail lines that excised the southeastern quadrant of the city from the commercial downtown. Finally, the Parks Commission was eager to remove the rail lines from the lakefront, envisioning a grand park along the lakeshore. The Boosters wanted the
river straightened; as though it was the lynch pin to Chicago’s greatness (Hill, 2000).

This was not the first time the I & M had sparked a major shift in the map of Chicago. The gridiron was originally drawn with respect the river, and as the city grew the pattern naturally expanded. With the implementation of the I &M Canal, the deeded lands adjacent to the waterway were drawn as a continuation of the grid. The resulting map displayed a sprawling metropolis, when in reality there were only a handful of people in the vicinity. The distorted maps helped fuel wild speculation in real estate (Churchill, 2004). The Boosters and speculators (if they were at all separate) carried the same expectations for the Southside with its unencumbered avenues, North to South and East to West. One equated it to the “Park Avenue” of Chicago, and there was eagerness over the tax revenues from the impending boom (Hill, 2000).

Construction

Work began September 1928 and finished in November of 1929, one month after the stock market crashed, hurling the country in the Great Depression. By 1933, the I & M Canal closed. The Cal-Sag Channel, linking Calumet Harbor with the Sanitary & Ship Canal ultimately realized the goal of the Deep Waterway, and remains in operation today (Hill, 2000). The vision for the development along the South Branch dissolved as well, leaving the newly in-filled land under the ownership of the rail companies, which in turn, left them effectively vacant until their sale, seventy years later. The Riverside District Development can be seen as the fruition of the Boosters vision, yet it followed the same pattern of boom and bust.

Lumber

Lumberyards expanded along the south branch of the river eastward approaching the lake and west to the limits of the city. Including the channels cut to link with rail cars further south along the branch there was more than twelve miles of docks for lumber ships. The yards held roughly 80 million dollars in capital, dwarfing the holdings of the Chicago’s banks in 1880 (Cronon, 1991). Yet, by 1900 the lumberyards were in sharp decline and completely gone by 1920. Once again, the Parcel weathered another of Chicago’s booms and busts.
The decline of the lumber district was not unlike the decline of the I & M Canal; the flows of capital shifted to another locale. In the case of the waterways, I & M lost out to Calumet Harbor and the Cal-Sag Channel, though Chicago still commanded the economies of the Deep Waterway. In Lumber's case, the material flow left Chicago entirely, shifting to the forests of the South and West (Cronon, 1991). In this case, the boundless dreams of the Chicago's merchants and boosters finally faced the limits of economics and ecology.

The White Pine was the coveted species in the northern woods of Michigan, Wisconsin and Minnesota. Besides sheer number of trees, and the quality of lumber they produced, the White pines were valued because they floated and could be transported from the forests by streams and rivers. In the seemingly inexhaustible northern forests, the pines were logged in the areas closes to the waterways. Logging tracts followed the paths of the rivers, flowing downstream until they reached a mill. The raw timber was cut into lumber and shipped across the great lakes, eventually landing on the docks of The South Branch (Cronon, 1991). That lumber in turn flowed out towards the prairies, providing the building material for virtually every structure built, as the country expanded west. Initially, farmers selling grain, in turn, bought lumber to for the homestead. The I & M Canal doubled the export of lumber in its first year of operation, and by the 1880's the lumberyards were fitted with rail exchanges to quickly fill and ship orders west (Cronon, 1991).

The downfall of the Lumber industry in Chicago was the exhaustion of White Pines in the northern forests. As the trees became scarce in proximity to the rivers, they were sought deeper into the forests. Rail lines were cut into the forests to extract the timber, but the White Pines had been logged in their entirety. Without forestry practices in place, the pines were not able to replenish themselves (Cronon, 1991). With the new rail lines carrying timber and lumber, there was no longer a need for the buoyant wood of the White Pines. Without the requirement of water travel, the mills no longer had to rely on shipping to distributors in Chicago. The numerous rail lines allowed mills to distribute timber via rail year round, and lumber interests in the south and west eventually overtook the lumber market (Cronon, 1991). The South Branch Parcel lost its identity as a lumber yard, but, for a time, it was connected to the shores of Lake Superior and the prairies of Nebraska.
**Frontier**

While it has lost the direct connections to the hinterland, the parcel can be seen a wild space for the city itself. In 1991, a young graffiti artist named William “Upski” Wimsatt began exploring the site, and encountered several homeless people who had built homes among the trees and brush that had sprouted on the site. In an article for the Chicago Reader, Upski declared, “With the increasing commercialization of land, it is the decaying places, like this one at the heart of our city, that have inherited one of the most sacred roles in the experience of our nation, that of the frontier” (Upski, 1991). In a city that has largely forgotten its role in shaping the landscape of the Midwest, it is understandable that 80 acres south of the loop can also go unnoticed. Perhaps Chicago built itself so gloriously that people cannot help but look inward at the marvel around them. In the way that Great Cutover was out of sight and mind of Chicagoans at the turn of the 20th century, the Parcel is a boiled-down hinterland that receives a similar regard. Upski describes one of the homeless men as an “American Homesteader” living in a makeshift structure with his dogs (Upski, 1991). Where that land once supplied pioneers with lumber to build their own homes, the Parcel can still provide for a few urban pioneers.

Nearly twenty years have passed since Upski wrote about the Parcel as Chicago's new frontier. The homeless people may still be there, new people may have settled there, but it is certain that the parcel is a constantly shifting landscape. In 2009 an article in AREA Magazine picked up Upski’s thread. The developers had still not broken ground, and the site was still largely ignored. The author wrote, “…the two groups most attracted to the site—developers and bohemians—experience the site in a strikingly similar fashion: it is a foil for their fantasies of urban space” (Yablon, 2010).
3. Precedent Review

Post-Industrial Landscapes

The Riverside Parcel is a post industrial landscape. In the last decade, post industrial landscapes have been at the forefront of Landscape Architectural practice and theory (Reed, 2008). In most cases, the post-industrial site is transformed into a permanent landscape project (or expected permanence). *Groundswell: Constructing the Contemporary Landscape* at the Museum of Modern Art exhibited dozens of post-industrial landscape projects, casting them as the cutting edge of the Landscape Architecture discipline (Reed, 2008). Concurrently, there is a stream of projects that operates from a grass-roots level, pioneering spaces, or uses of the built environment. This thesis attempts to thread between these two. The scale of the site lends itself to the high profile, permanent park landscape, yet the realities of private ownership and development plans points to a lighter, ephemeral approach to the site.

Grassroots

With the Post-industrial parks, the unconventional, temporary projects share the cutting edge of the Landscape Architecture discipline. Many projects are undertaken from a grassroots platform. Projects such as ReBar (Park)ing, guerilla gardening, Critical Mass, flash mobs, etc were undertaken as a measure of temporary augmentation of the staied urban landscape, and often a critique of the existing conditions. These are representative of landscape activism, and provide an example of eager urbanites hungry for new forms of urban design.

Projects such as Recetas Urbanas’ “Proyectar con Luces” demonstration in Seville, Spain, are aimed more towards resistance. In opposition to a proposed development, the community members wore fluorescent lights attached to backpacks containing batteries and marched in the footprints of proposed buildings (http://www.recetasurbanas.net/index.php?idioma=ESP&REF=1&ID=0001). While grounded in the consideration of the existing landscape and the commentary that comes with all demonstrations,
this project had the specific goal to resist a mar on the neighborhood. On a larger scale, Natalie Jerimejenko has created the Environmental Health Clinic, a program that uses media, public spectacle and landscape interventions to broadly resist the forces of environmental degradation (http://www.environmentalhealthclinic.net/environmental-health-clinic/). In the context of a predominant critique, the UK graffiti/stencil artist Banksy uses public space to deface the rampant advertising and lampoon the political and social fabric. His work extends beyond the UK and in 2005 created images on the Separation Wall in Israel’s West Bank, depicting holes through the wall glimpsing images of post-card paradises (http://arts.guardian.co.uk/pictures/0,,1543331,00.html). The work utilizes the massive landscape intervention of the wall itself and speaks to the ultimate goal of peace between the two sides. However, the intentionally saccharine images “through” the wall speaks pessimistically, and calls attention to the massiveness and brutality of the Separation Wall.

Each instance uses the work of public spectacle to foster an idea about the urban environment. The Riverside Parcel has evidence of incursion and marginal endeavors, but the size of the parcel and its many barriers to access creates a vacuum where any voice of the citizenry cannot be heard by the urban core.
Parc Downsview Park, Toronto, ON

Parc Downsview Park Toronto is a project that shares some similarities with the riverside parcel. A former Canadian Military airbase, an extensive park is envisioned for the site. “Tree City,” the winning entry from OMA and Bruce Mau Design approached the project as a systematic framework of development, unfolding as funding became available and as park goers explored and programmed spaces (Czerniak 2007). The project shares a sense of frugality, and bricolage with the Riverside parcel. Downsview is a much larger area than the Riverside parcel, and while Downsview has become engulfed in the greater Toronto area (Czerniak, 2007), the proximity to the core of Toronto is not on par with the mere blocks that separate the Riverside parcel. Most notably, the ultimate vision for Downsview Park is a lasting public park landscape. As a privately owned property, the physical endeavors into the site, and the programming that blossoms can be erased to accommodate the planned condominium developments.
Templehof Airport, Berlin, DE

Templehof Airport in Berlin is a decommission airport in the outskirts of Berlin. The landscape has been in limbo for many years, as proposals for development are pitched, accepted and discarded. The city finally decided to open the runways and fields up to the public as the proposal process slowly unfolds. The effect is a unique landscape experience: people are able to colonize the sites for informal programming without any designed perimeters or cues. Patrons have commented on the ability to see the skyline clearly, something that the diffuse urban center makes difficult (McIntyre 2010). Compared to the Riverside parcel, the location of the airport is at the periphery of Berlin's urban form. As a former airport, the scale of Templhof dwarfs the Riverside parcel, and although both site share remnant infrastructure the runways of Templhof are in far better condition and vastly larger than the concrete pads of Riverside. From an ownership standpoint, Templhof is a publicly owned site. It shares a "stalled" existence with the Riverside parcel, but the citizen entrance into the site falls under public oversight, whereas Riverside would need the cooperation of the owner to handle security and services.
The Leslie St. Spit in Toronto serves as a similar example of an urban landscape that continues in a productive capacity. The Leslie St. Spit was created through a dumping program from public works in Toronto in the 1960’s. The spit was meant to serve as a harbor barrier while continuing to offer a space for dumping projects. In the following decades, and ecology took root and eventually became a destination for bird and other fauna of the Great Lakes Region. Toronto opened up portions of the spit to recreation while still maintaining a dumping program for the site (Belanger, 2009). The site functions in four ways, as a repository for the material waste from within the city, as a barrier for the maintenance of the Harbor, as an ecological/habitat preserve and finally as a recreation destination. This project diverges from the Riverside parcel in that it is not listed for residential/commercial development. In though they are both in-fill projects, Leslie St. spit is far a more contemporary phenomenon than the Riverside parcel. In the future, if dumping programs have ceased and the land is sold to a developer, the site will acquire some similar questions as to its use. Presently though it is a model for a multi-dimensional urban landscape with public access. Its strategic location allows migratory routes of birds, which has provided a marketable attraction The system of paths have made recreation a natural progression of validating this site as a valued landscape for Toronto (Belanger, 2009).
The Jane Addams homes were constructed as a low income housing project in the early sixties. The design incorporated areas of low rise and high rise developments. The development was decommissioned in the late nineties, and all of the buildings have been steadily demolished thorough the early 2000’s (Cottrell, 2009). The remaining landscape of the five high rise buildings is one of a vast, empty field with remnant streets and central courtyards to the buildings. The low rise area however, predates the high rise area, and was built with respect to the grid iron street pattern. The buildings were removed seemingly surgically, and the remaining landscape contains what amounts to yards, with shade trees, totally devoid of any structures. The area is so forgotten, or forsaken that it was overlooked in the transition from parking meters to pay/park kiosks. The result is an eerie vacancy punctuated by long stretches of parking meters simultaneously blinking “expired.” The cosmic irony also alludes to the impending development. The Medical Campuses of UIC and Rush Hospitals are slowly acquiring the land and building new offices and health service buildings, moving in from the north. This landscape is important in that is one of many terrain vagues in the city. It means that the Riverside Parcel is not ignored simply because of the infrastructural barriers to the site or messages sent from fences and property signals.

This site also reflects the succession of a housing development. There are many differences between the genesis or goals of the an upscale condo development in the south loop compared to a Housing project two miles west of the downtown. Both however were/are envisioned as lasting residential developments. The value of the land can only be extracted from the construction of residential units - and therefore
an endgame or the “life” of the riverside parcel. The Jane Addams homes though, were not seen as a temporary solution. The forty year lifespan of the development and many other CHA projects in Chicago indicate that values of land use and social services change in Chicago. Perhaps high end residential complexes or health-care facilities are the most lasting incarnations of value in the city, but the capricious nature of value could eventually impact the Riverside Development or the new hospital campuses, for that matter.
4. Literature Review

Script

The built environment constitutes a script to the urban dweller. Alex Wall wrote, “The influx of people, vehicles goods and information constitute what urban geographers call the daily urban system, painting a picture of urbanism that is dynamic and temporal” (1999:234). When the urban fabric encounters a void, a terrain vague, the script is warped into a miasma of questions about the roles of citizens, their powers that preside over the city, and the meaning of the void in the urban form.

Power within Terrain Vague

Igní Sola-Morales Rubio defined the Terrain Vague as “unincorporated margins, interior islands void of activity, oversights, in short they are foreign to the urban system, mentally exterior in the physical interior of the city as much a critique as a possible alternative (1995:120). The terrain vague’s inherent demonstration of alternative creates a dichotomy: “The presence of power invites one to escape the its totalizing presence...urban order [compared]to the indefiniteness of the terrain vague” (1995:121) Guy Debord contends in sweeping broadness, “In societies where modern conditions of production prevail, all life presents itself as an immense accumulation of spectacles” (1967:1). He continues, that, because society is inundated in spectacle, the contrasts that Rubio asserts are part of a constant, constructed flux. If this system of mediated contrasts is exposed, the system breaks down (1967). The terrain vague exists as spectacle as though it is the fascinating calm in the eye of a spectacular storm.

Chris Reed stated, in his essay for the Groundswell Exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, “landscapes are made and remade. (2004:15) The illustration for the essay was a drawing by Humphrey Repton, where a factory was eliminated with the flip of a page and a bucolic pasture lay in its place. Reed frames it as the antiquated approach to post industrial sites. Within the exhibition, dozens of projects dealing with post-industrial landscapes are displayed and in the majority, the “new” vision of designers embraced and attempted to reconcile the previous use with the new landscape. Reed states, “Because of
the role public space plays as a catalyst for urban development and in the quality of civic life, how these palliative spaces are treated is ultimately a reflection of our culture” (2004:16). Unfortunately, the flip of the page ignores developmental “limbo” of many post industrial landscapes. It is the power of economy, enterprise and the government to initiate the “palliative” landscapes of the groundswell exhibition. If the terrain vague is any “reflection of our culture,” the public has little appetite, or a dulled appreciation for the spectacle of the void. Debord argues in defense of the diluted appreciation: “The oldest socialist specialization, the specialization of power, is at the root of the spectacle. It is the diplomatic representation of hierarchic society to itself, where all other expression is banned (1967:6). It is not ignorance that divides the site from the consciousness of the citizens, it is the dictation of the script to offer the “totalizing presence of power.”

Empowerment in Terrain Vague

This is not to say that the public is completely devoid of consideration for these spaces. The activities unconventional urbanists such as Richard Reynolds’ Guerilla Gardening, Natalie Jerimejenko’s Environmental Health Clinic, ReBar’s (Park)ing and others express the contrasting power of grassroots or individual curiosity and empowerment for the urban landscape. Each of these cases, though, aims to bring attention to the condition of the urban environment, be it the marginality, the lack of open space, or the environmental conditions. To gain attention, these projects employ spectacle, employing programs that contrast the urban fabric to a new vision of urbanity. Debord’s argument that the otherness is intrinsic to the whole is evident here. While these projects attempt to cultivate a new sense of the city, they align completely with the tenants of urban life. Given Debord’s circuitous model, a spectrum can be derived with the “baseline” urban form on one end and its intrinsic “other” at the opposite end. The terrain vague as it is digested by the citizen travels closer to the typical form, and as a rule, there must be a typical urban form that is being displaced into the realm of otherness, void, or inverted spectacle.

Design with Spectacle

Debord laments the societal subjugation to the spectacle (1967), but the designer’s role is almost
completely ensconced in Debord's paradigm of spectacle. As a result, the designer has the responsibility to treat the terrain vague with the understanding that his or her work is a mediation of the society. Rubio warns, “Architecture's destiny has always been colonization, ...the introduction into strange space of the elements of identity necessary to make it recognizable, identical, universal” (1995:122). In the discussion between the post industrial landscape park, and the guerilla incursions into a post-industrial terrain vague, both are apparatus of colonization. However, Rubio's concern is for the bland formalization, and both parties attempt to leverage a unique vision for the development of the void. Rubio remains adamant: “When architecture or urban design project their desire onto a... terrain vague they seem incapable of doing anything other than introducing violent transformations, changing estrangement into citizenship, and striving at all costs to dissolve the uncontaminated magic of the obsolete in the realism of efficacy” (1995:122). Rubio is echoing Debord's continuum of otherness and wholeness. He continues, ”The divided individual of the contemporary city looks for forces instead of forms, for the incorporated instead of the distant, the haptic instead of the optic, the rhizomatic instead of the figurative. (1995:123) It is here that the post-industrial landscape begins to falter and the grassroots, guerilla projects find footing. The spectacular tactics used in the Guerilla projects are precisely the “rhizomatic forces” that coincide with Alex Wall description of the Daily Urban system - the script that a designer can manipulate for a desired effect. The generation of force, flow or popularity through a grassroots project, ultimately slide across the spectrum to the stayed, “mainstream” spectacle. This is the advantage of the post industrial park, where it is robust enough to weather the flux of novel and passe, and will remain an asset to the public, and an architectural achievement even if it is lumped into the “recognizable, identical, universal”

**Spectacle to Legibility**

The post-industrial park, or the grassroots engagement of the landscape are adversarial to the purity of the terrain vague, and Rubio is, or would be, most concerned with universality of residential high-rise developments. The instantaneous city that it is championed in the real estate publications refutes the conversation seemingly without ever considering the void beyond its monetary assignment. The deliberation of the meaning of the terrain vague is rendered moot, but the persistence of the void,
in the case of the Riverside Parcel, allows a designer to deploy a hybrid of both the grassroots forces intervention and the legibility of the post industrial park. The inevitable slide from cutting edge landscape engagement to diluted cultural norm operates at a level that is above the unimaginative condominium development. With a spectacular landscape intervention to riverside parcel before development, and as a catalyst of development, the eventual design can be elevated above the “identical.” However, the legibility of the intervention must be legible in order to engender a connection between the spectacle and the development. Julia Czerniak contends that the success of large parks, often post industrial or recovered landscapes, is their legibility and resilience. (2007). In the case of Tree City design for Downsview Park in Toronto, she writes, “In one way the dots allow the park to be understood in its intentions, organizations, and imagery, - it is legible... The big green dot, understood as the parks logo, gave it an immediate and marketable identity (2007:235). This legibility and image are precisely the mediated spectacle that Debord unmasks. Essentially, the designer is harnessing the tendencies the spectacle of “otherness” to diffuse into the spectacle of “wholeness” in order to guide a project that can be qualified as a “higher” into the built environment. Overlaid onto the impending condo development, the spectacle of “otherness” can buoy the design from falling into the blandness of the “wholeness”. The spectacle offers resilience in its ability to constantly represent the void, even if it is erased.

**Formalization**

James Corner declared in the introduction to Recovering Landscape, “…landscape has the ability to engage the metaphysical and political programs that operate in a given society, that landscape architecture is not simply a reflection of culture but more an instrument in the shaping of modern culture. (1999:1) He is broadly suggesting that the discipline has the power to act as cultural spectacle. It would operate equally from the spectacle of the void and the spectacle of the mass. He ends with the statement, “There are more creative reasons to recover sites… reasons that see invention as an essential ingredient of reclamation, engendering new kinds of landscape for public enjoyment and use. (1999:13). By mediating culture from the arena of landscape we are destined to invent new forms for the built environment. The condo complexes that Rubio opposes can find new forms, patterns, and productivity as the spectacle of landscape
pervades our culture. The Daily Urban System, the script of the city, responds uniquely to the ability of the landscape architect to mediate the void to the mass.
5. Site Investigation

Succession

From 1938 to 2010, the images describe over 70 years of change in Chicago’s near south region. The forms that are present on the current aerial photograph clearly originate in the infrastructures of its climax as a railyard. Concrete foundations and pavement remains on the site in places, and earthwork for train grades have created abrupt topographic elements. This palimpsest speaks to a larger trend of succession on the site. From its historical roots as pre-development marsh, to its present state and its proposed development into residential units, the site is seemingly on a trajectory to a “climax” of high-end residential buildings and supporting infrastructures and open space. However, looking in the future, perhaps another seventy years, it is a certainty that the city will have changed. Without indulging in more speculation, this point is important in that it framed the condominium development, something ubiquitous and with enormous heft, as ephemeral. It allowed the conceptualization of the condos as a malleable, dynamic force rather than a lamentable brittle urban form.
Much of the research and investigative experiments dealt with the successional landscape, however the above images explore the dynamics of the sites succession. Though the site’s rail infrastructure has been dismantled, the adjacent railyard is compelling image of Chicago’s continuum as a destination for material flows. Viewed from Roosevelt Rd. the rail yard extends linearly to the south and the interplay of tracks is evident. This image spurred an evolution in the research from simply collecting phenomena of change in the landscape to deriving pattern and orchestration.

The pattern of switches, visible from the elevated roadway diverts from a single track into a pattern of near rhizomatic offshoots. The pattern of track branches from an arterial line entering the yard to a curving system of tributary tracks. The pattern was recognizable in the research for the straightening of the river; where the river once meandered, a “switch” was thrown and the river was diverted into a more direct route.
through the river corridor. When this connection as extrapolated to the historical research, the creation of this parcel, rhetorically, was a result of a series for binary decisions on the course of transportation and material flows. The competition for a dominant deep water channel embodied a switch at the headwaters of the Illinois River. Stepping further back, the race to claim the bounty of the Middle West produced a switch from the docks of St. Louis to the elevators of the Chicago River.

The rail switch offered a preliminary design trope for the activation of the fallow parcel. Given the impending development, the design for the site would require a light, responsive programming that could switch on itself if development or programming dictated the need.
This project began with aspirations for a landscape that would serve as a synapse between the commercial core of Chicago with its industrial armature. Though the site is exceedingly large for its urban context, the pressures of the surrounding areas and its legacy as a post-industrial site immediately presented obstacles to this vision. The primary concern for this site was its value. At nearly a billion dollars, any proposal for a productive landscape paled in comparison to its potential as a real estate development. Several land uses were sketched in the following montages. Activating the site for a singular purpose, such as a recycling center, sculpture park, or learning center could not be reconciled. Given the amount of money invested in the parcel, no venture could begin to “pay off” and entice the owners to dedicate the land to this purpose. Furthermore, the productivity that was imagined, such as an energy station, farm, or storm water basin was eliminated in that while, expansive, the site was not big enough to provide an appreciable amount to a city the size of Chicago. An early criticism of this rational was that the site may not operate on a scale to serve the entire city, but it could produce some amount of power, food or storage for the city. Again, the rational concluded that productivity of 64 acres could not account for its billion dollar price tag.
Industry, Vacancy, and Terrains Vagues

The phenomena of the Riverside parcel is not isolated in its position in Chicago. As Chicago has expanded and contracted, lands have been left fallow. One notable source of is the deactivation of public housing projects and their ultimate demolition has left numerous tracts of land open, waiting for development. The Jane Addams Housing Project lies roughly two miles west of the Riverside Parcel and similarly exists as a terrain vague. Though the site is far more accessible than the Riverside Parcel, little activity has entered the site. Presumably the site is for sale or is considered for development in a public arena, but as the process unfolds, the land is fallow, ignored and wasted. The Grain Elevator at 31st and Damen poses a similar question as the riverside parcel. Property along the river goes without notice and the elevator...
is used as a canvass for the developer to advertise its sale and for graffiti artist to adorn with their own activity. As is often the case, the only advocates or volunteers for a marginal landscape are those outside of the law or purveyors of the socially illicit. The Bloomingdale trail is a terrain vague that has garnered some attention in recent years. Given the development and popularity of the High Line project in New York, Chicago's derelict elevated railways have become vogue. However, the same barriers exist for development of the Bloomingdale trail as do for the Riverside Parcel. Lack of funding, serious liabilities in the structure and ecological concerns, and disagreements in the plan for former rail lines have stymied development. Even so, the Bloomingdale trail has become a popular destination for exercise and recreation. There is minimal enforcement by the rail company and the increasing exploration by residents increases the momentum for action (Greenfield 2009).
These images can offer insight into the landscape of a developing territory. This area, directly north of the site has been slowly developing over the last decade and exists as a hodgepodge of fallow land, construction sites, Staging areas for incoming construction, pay-parking lots, and completed buildings. This area differs from the riverside development because it is not owned as a solid parcel. The disparate ownership is a factor that prevents cohesive vision for the land use, and the result is a series of fences, rubble piles and marginal open spaces. The system, though, can serve as a model of inexpensiveness, or non-investment. If this is the landscape of development that uses as few dollars as possible, it can be extrapolated that a similar landscape would appear as the Riverside development was constructed.
The Riverside District is a proposed development of Chicago South Loop in the Near South planning district. The development will add 4600 housing units, in the form of high rise and low rise condos, and town homes. Commercial space is planned in conjunction with the residences including retail, restaurants and nightclubs, the project is billed as city within a city, a ready made lifestyle. The development has been on hold for a decade, with ownership switching hands at least three times, each transaction exponentially greater than the last. The Roosevelt Collection, the new condo and theaterplex development completed in 2009, has yet to sell its condo units and has resorted to renting. The future of the riverside district is tenuous, however there was approval to TIF funding for the extension of Wells St. through the site to connect with Wentworth Ave on the east side of the Ping Tom Park extension (Corfman, 2006).
The private ownership of the site has been fraught issues since CSX sold the site to developers in 1999 for an undisclosed amount. The sale of the property 2002 later totaled 67 million dollars. One of the partners of the development company was Antione Rezko an alleged financier of alleged illegal dealings surrounding former governor Rod Blagojevich. The pressures surrounding the notoriety and mounting taxes and consultant fees forced Rezmar Corp. to sell the site to Nadhmi Auchi's Mediterranean Holdings Company for 150 million in 2005. Within a year, Auchi had begun negotiations with DiBartolo Holdings, offering 17 of the 64 acres for 131 million. The deal eventually collapsed and Auchi remains the sole owner. Theses dealings illustrate the tremendous increase in dollar value of the site; growing exponentially over the course of a single decade. Also, it demonstrates the tactic of splitting the site into smaller properties. Although it remains under a single owner, the site may be destined to imitate the forms of territory just north of site. It creates an urgency for initiating development. As another Chicago developer is quoted, “You need to start something” (Corfman, 2006).
This image is central to the speculation that the public encounters this site without truly seeing it. The diagram combines the schedules of the vehicles moving through the site combined with the timing that the public will most likely see the site from the street or the surrounding residences. The variations in grades, impediments of infrastructure, and the legacy of inaccessibility have create a terrain vague Chicago’s South loop. Yet, daily, commuters, residents, pedestrians and motorists encounter this landscape and the vast majority adhere to the status quo: the urban directive not to touch apparent “otherness” there are thousands of people who could see this land everyday, and the motivation of this project is to allow for the encounter of this vague terrain. The visual negotiation with the site must be parleyed into a physical encounter. Through this, the unique landscape of the site can become accepted at very least as a legitimate condition of urban lands and at its greatest, prioritization of landscape in the urban consciousness.
These images outline the major features and considerations for a proposed design and program. “Site Features” is an analysis of major topographic formations left by the previous rail infrastructure and recent sewer installations. “Site Liabilities” is a diagram of potentially dangerous or confrontational uses within the site. The rail track on the eastern edge of the site is not fenced from the expanse of land. Likewise, the site is used by various vehicles to access the construction of the Ping Tom Park Extension. Contending with the vehicles would eventually subside, however their use on the site is one of the only visible actions from Roosevelt and further contribute to an understanding that the site is not meant for public interaction or investigation. “Site Access” defines the current pathways into the site. Entry from the north requires entering through a gap cut into the fence. Access from the south requires that one must cross two active train tracks without being spotted by the control facility at 15th St, which has an access point of its own for employee vehicles. Finally, one may access the site from a personal water craft such as a kayak or canoe. The sea wall has washed away in places and it is possible to climb the bank, possibly even dragging the craft up behind them. The final three drawings outline the proposed street system, building footprints, and open space.
Urban prairie has taken over the site and in the past decade, the fits and starts of development projects have created both dramatic and subtle landscape features, some permanent and some temporary. The land is presumed to be a brownfield, and given that the Ping Tom Extension required scraping large amounts of topsoil, it is assumed the development will take the same measures. Development of the Roosevelt Collection and Cinema Complex a condo development on the site directly north off of Roosevelt was completed in 2009 and has not yet sold out its units, and has resorted to leasing.

The plants on the site are mostly pioneer species. Ragweed and Stiff Goldenrod comprise the grassy areas and the most prominent woody species are the Eastern Cottonwood and Ailanthus, Boxelders and Sumac. There is an abundance of insect species, some small mammals such as rabbits and squirrels, and some bird species, though far fewer than would be expected by the amount of land, potential food, and proximity to water.
6. Design Process

Overview

The design proposes the activation of the Riverside parcel fallow area for flexible public programming. This design of this activation is requested funded by the developer. This design is proposed as a new form of “front end” residential development design. The activation of the site is an alternative to the current fenced, stagnant condition which deters interest and deprives the surrounding constituency of a unique urban landscape. The thesis argues that the program of the site and the interaction with the urban terrain vague will legitimize the normally marginal aesthetic. The final form of the development will incorporate from and program from the designed activation.
In the process of this development and formalization, the site will offer public programming, open space and connection to an otherwise locked, marginal territory. This interaction can begin almost immediately. Development has been on hold for nearly a decade, and the designed activation is flexible to the eventual initiation of construction. The design can respond to immediate, simultaneous construction or the possibility of construction being delayed indefinitely. The design is intended to serve both the developer and surrounding constituents, essentially bringing them together to catalyze development, so the designed program generates eventual construction.
This thesis proposes a system of operations, a primer, that ensures the creation of creative programming and the continuation of amenity throughout the construction process.

1. Construction of Buildings entails space of footprint and construction site.
2. Action amenity spaces are allotted with every new building space at an equal size.
3. Action / Amenity space may exist from before development
4. Building space may displace Action/Amenity space
5. Action / Amenity may not displace Building space, though it may influence it.
6. Building Space left Fallow must be established as Action /Amenity or Surface / System

*Open Space Value spurs Development Value.
*Development Value displaces Open Space Value
*Spectacle and Program will ultimately be formalized into Development design.
Scripting

The built environment is a script, and despite the conditions of the Riverside parcel, it is the fallow state of highly engineered landscape. This thesis proposes the activation of the site through spectacle and public programming that is responsive to a primer of development. The process described in figure 28 uses hypothetical examples to illustrate a type of intervention strategy. The process begins with a installation of spectacle within the site that is visible from the surrounding city. The second phase is to open the site to programmed events, such as a sculpture installation or music venue. As space is used for different events, more area is used further into the site. The formations of the site will offer varied programming as the script progresses. The spectacle instillations will move according to and that is not yet programmed and programmed land moves to new lands as it is displaced the eventual construction process. The vision of this thesis pictures a new form of urban living, where a luxury condo is surrounded by, community gardens, bee keepers, mountain bike races, music performances, art walks, ecological classes, university functions, movie sets and so on. The juxtaposition of a new building surrounded by marginal lands is counter acted by legitimizing the landscape with activity. The new lifestyle this engenders will create a demand for the formalization of these programs into the ultimate development design. The script for the site is extrapolated into true script of the built environment.
The thesis proposed a system of spectacles to reestablish the site’s entrance into the psyche of the city. Here, birdhouses are envisioned as pseudo follies in the landscape, yet serving the purpose of attracting birds and providing habitat. The houses themselves can tap into the Chicago Park District’s “Tweet Home Chicago” birdhouse competition or be designed by leading artists and designers. The effect of the birds and the structural birdhouses is spectacle. The projects envisions the bird societies taking over the pedestrian space on Roosevelt Rd. as they congregate to watch the various species of birds. The bystanders that would otherwise not even look at the site will now be confronted with a phenomena and in that moment they become witnesses to the spectacle, the site and the potential of an unseen landscape.
With the designer taking in a front end role in the development of this condo construction, the roles can be defined by the initial intensity of their opportunism. Action/Amenity landscapes refers to the times that spans both the programming phase and the inception of condo construction. These are the spaces
that drive interest, participation and legitimacy for the site. These projects operate on many scales; the implementation of an art exhibition space, for instance is considered an action/amenity because it is a program for the space that offers a public interaction with the site. It is here that the site and the established city and communities can fuse. The site offers the backdrop to the art piece, but the spectacle of the urban prairie will also be an attraction. The experience of access and discovery of the site will drive the demand for more creative programming. These action spaces legitimize the site, framing it as a space of opportunity, rather than emptiness. This is the shift necessary to generate interest in the construction of the residential structures. Visitors to the site could imagine themselves living there, with the luxuries provided by the accommodations and the creativity that weaves through the larger site. In this the programming is both action and amenity.

This vision is one of succession. In this project, it permutations through history, the peculiar topographies and an eventually the flipping of the property has pointed to a shifting succession. In the action/amenity framework, two successions are being described. The pioneering elements to populate the site with program, extracting the value of use from the fallow site. Then, as interest is garnered, investment secured, the condos will be built, displacing the program to more remote areas of the site. The limits of the site dictate the programming will eventually be constricted into dissolution. This is a very real scenario, however, the project suggests that there is the opportunity for the value of the land to be recalibrated. The project suggests that the programs could be successful or popular enough to gain a more permanent foothold on the site, wether through a public-private partnership that concedes a portion of the site for public use in return for taller building limits, for example.

Secondly, from a more grassroots perspective, the people who chose to live in the development because of the unique offering from the programs may choose to implement them in to the scale at which they live or operate. If none of the programming takes root within the development, its inherent flexibility could shift to an entirely different site, for instance, the Jane Addams Homes site. The Stakeholders and participants from the Riverside Parcel programs could easily move to this site and begin the process of spectacle, access investment, and development.
Factors such as proximity to the river, and the extension of Wells St. would influence the sequence of construction. In this model the site is developed from its north west border to its southeast border.

Also, cost and construction requirements were considered, and a two-building construction regime was predicted. Neither the specific pattern or numbers of structures built is entirely crucial. The system for activating the available land is responsive to the development in either direction or scale.
Surface/System

Surface system this is the second level of intensity for the intra-development landscapes. They are separated from action/amenity by their situation, locally, in the site and in their function. Though they are different, it must be said that they can exist with thin the same time span as action/amenity spaces. The surface/system spaces addresses the condition that are seen in the lands directly north of the site. Disparate, lasting wastelands of fenced fallowness, construction sites or material staging, pay-parking lots and isolated gargantuan high-rise structures. These are the prospects facing the potential residents of this site. The surface system sites aim to manipulate the potential eyesores of staging sites into area that capture the attention and imagination of the residents. Where, action amenity spaces provide programming or inter-activity, the surface system are aesthetic interventions, morphing the usual stockpiles into a legible, engrossing landscape.

Surface/System spaces operate as a place holder for the “next” construction site. Depending on the availability of action amenity space, the land that is set to be either a building site or construction site is the least fertile place to adopt a action/amenity landscape. However the typical developments face the dilemma of new construction punctuated by fenced-off, scraped landscapes with perhaps a woven fence cover displaying a graphic of the incoming building. Like vast fallow sites, these smaller spaces are also
existing below their value. Given that these spaces are meant to hold the materials that create a landscape, the gravel, the mulch the trees in burlap, the rolls of sod, the palettes of bricks, pavers and so on, these do not achieve their aesthetic value solely in the hermetic frame of the finished landscape.
Developer/Legible

Developer Legible Landscapes refer to the traditional, permanent landscapes that are the usual territory of the Landscape Architect. These are the parks and green spaces that are recognizable to the traditional urban script. In the “Central Park” plan the large green areas would be product of the normal pathway for landscape architecture. Images from SCB drawings allude to a wetland system that, if using best practices, would treat the water from the residential structures (www.scb.com 2009).

In terms of the designed activation, these spaces may ignore the action/amenity that previously occupied the space. If this is the case, the developer/legible spaces will produce the traditional parks that fit neatly into the script of the city. If the program and forms of the activated landscape are incorporated, these spaces will exude the unique energy that catalyzed the development and attracted a more adventurous constituency.
This thesis offers a vision for the treatment of urban marginal space, left fallow by the complications of private, developer driven projects. In this vision, a city’s residents are introduced to a landscape that is hidden, either literally obscured, or hiding in plain sight, excised from their consciousness. The hurdles of money, apathy, and momentum are confronted and surmounted. The result is a possible regime to orchestrate public interaction with private, undeveloped landscapes. The regimes impact in its least powerful form is gaining access, and extracting the latent value of the site through programming and public activation. This also includes catalyzing the development of the parcel, and the greater urban context, (in the is case the South Loop) from a neutral standpoint. The condos eventually wipe out the programming on the site and the entire orchestration fades away or finds a new site to begin again. However, in its greatest function, this scripting can recalibrate the priorities of the citizens, municipality and the developer. The vision is of a city that recognizes the urban prairie, or the feral landscape as a legitimate urban condition and value it aesthetics, ecology and the heritage that permeates its condition.

The design of the condominiums is not set in stone. This thesis proposes that the integration of light programming with the traditional condo development will naturally try to integrate and
formalize the informality of the programming. Overall this system enables the meeting of the urban citizen with the “other” within their city. Where Sola Morales Rubio argues against the designer’s will to tame these space, this project offers the designer as an interpreter between the built, identical city and the void. It becomes the choice of the constituents to value a cultivated incivility.
8. Citations

“Banksy at the West Bank Barrier index || guardian.co.uk Arts.” Culture || guardian.co.uk. http://arts.guardian.co.uk/pictures/0,,1543331,00.html (accessed April 25, 2010).


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