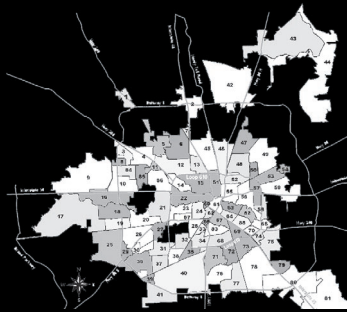
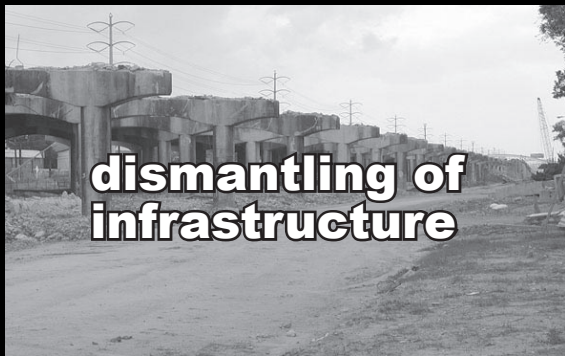


Wards Map, 1912 City of Houston



Superneighborhoods, 2005 City of Houston



**dismantling of
infrastructure**



**redirection of
streets**



**unregulated
historicisism**

Welcome to Houston, Texas

by Eric Leshinsky Houston, Texas, is emblematic of certain global trends in dynamic urbanism: it has the rapid and uncontrolled growth, continuous population movements, rapidly-reconfigured architecture, perpetual bouts with transportation, and sheer expansiveness that has made it and other global cities into the objects of architectural fascination and spectacle.(1)

But for visitors to Houston, any immediate fascination often transitions quickly into an extended period of dismay and total disorientation. Indeed, even for the city's residents, the rhetorical question of "where is the city?" is both humour and sobering reality.

"Houston's stability is literally attacked by time and motion; it is a city formed in a series of conjunctive episodes that hold their relationships for relatively brief periods... Displacements of traditional patterns of stability and urban rituals have become the norm. Time has become a prime variable in determining the genius loci." -Bruce Webb (3)

If Houston is indeed a city, let alone the 4th largest city in the United States, it is a metropolis somehow cobbled together from a continuously expanding and contracting set of elusive-- almost undercover-- urbanisms and a set of development guidelines that can seem more designed for urban disintegration than cohesion. With no binding laws for historic preservation and no zoning code to specify land-use, urban planning in this city means deregulation and architecture that comes and goes like the weather. Indeed, Houston has always been a city that privileges commerce and quick profit and to that end, its urban form reflects the turbulence of the market economy in a very pure way.

www.missing-pla

"In the city the perpetual origins, for a secure site of deferred by their being retold bers (2)

The Museum for Missing

information project that uses tactical media contemporary issues of urban place identity exhibits, the Museum proposes alternative w rapid and unregulated urban change and the u marks.

Situated in Houston, Texas, the Museum is--be historical continuity has long been distinguish architecture rather than its fixity. Houston is li geographic disruptions-- the buildings of the rected streets are the norm and volatile weath just a few examples. These disruptions crea perpetual discontinuity, and the job of ma population.

As a museum in the traditional sense ordering and exhibiting informatio mats. What distinguishes this m Houston's elusive urbanism shifting terrain of a city fleeting as the city

"The importance of not 'addressing a people which is presupposed already there' is, at this moment fundamental to the 'invention of a people' we are at present unable to see." -Albert Pope (4)

An urban life does exist behind the fragmented edifice of Houston, but one which demands investigation. For in the eyes of a visitor to Houston, this urban life will appear to quickly evaporate upon exiting one of Houston's massive shopping malls. But the marks of an elusive public can be found elsewhere; in the unassuming handmade signs mounted on street poles; in the drive-thru recycling center activated by a continuous stream of visitors; on the jogging track around Memorial

Park, perhaps the busiest track of its kind in the country. To see Houston's urban life may require a relentless attention to observation, a curiosity for that which exists beyond the private realm and an appreciation for puzzles that can never be fully solved, but to neglect this investigation would serve to perpetuate the myth of unintelligible urbanism and a city somehow unhinged from its constitutive urban life however elusive it may be.

Eric Leshinsky is an architect, artist and curator of the Museum for Missing Places. He lives in Houston, Texas

Endnotes

- 1 See Deyan Sudjic, *The 100 Mile City* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1992) and Rem Koolhaas, Stefano Boeri, Sanford Kwinter et al., *Mutations* (Barcelona: Actar, 2001)
- 2 Iain Chambers, "Architecture, Amnesia, and the Emergent Archaic", in *The Unknown City*, eds. Iain Borden, Joe Kerr, Jane Rendell, with Alicia Pivaro (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001)
- 3 Bruce Webb, "The Name Game", in *Cite Magazine* 46 (Houston, TX.)
- 4 Albert Pope, *Ladders* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996)



volatile weather



architectural hybridization



rapid demolition



rapid redevelopment



complete erasure