The Space Between

Jake Groth
Iowa State University

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THE SPACE BETWEEN
Interstitial space is located in the in-between. It's located beneath elevated highways and above sidewalks, between one structure and another; it is ubiquitous architecture that passes by unnoticed. It is silent, unyielding, and is constructed by occupants and its surroundings. It is not urban planning or the network of streets and alleys that connect buildings, rather it is residual, transitional space that is ephemeral; it is changed and defined by our movement through it. It is a space clearly visible to the newcomer's eye, who is unfamiliar to the particular environment of a city. There one can observe the habitation of leftover space and voids, which is the result of planning, no planning, and the unintended.

Cities are massive and see many changes, successes, and failures. Many of which contribute to the form of the space in-between, but what is interesting about the circumstances of these spaces is their potential for design opportunity. So much of our architectural design energy is focused on creating structures that solve problems at the scale of our designated 'site.' Often overlooked is that architecture is the process of carving through void. Within this process, the creation of a form is made in consideration to its spatial consequence. It is similar to the relationship between people and space. As each acts, the other reacts. It is a symbiotic relationship of stimulus and stimulant.

The "L" has a dramatic presence on the cityscape experience in Chicago. People move through, under and around it. Most people view architecture passively, therefore, spatial consequences are rarely appreciated as a particular architecture of a city. I challenge you to look at the city differently, view the canyon walls made of steel and glass and scrutinize them for what they really are - a sea of mass filled with inhabitable voids. It is a figure and ground formed by cityscape and vacancies, which can also be seen in its reverse. Dissimilar from an open field of space, the vertical, enveloping nature of the city's walls contribute to a greater expanse of space more substantial than themselves alone.

As occupants respond to this space they define it through their movement. But without an environment to help define their traces on the city become lost. Architecture should instead act as a stage for the performance of people. Provisional spaces such as these are haphazardly located throughout the city. They are powerful because they leave room for unintended opportunity and chance from passersby and occupants. The design of Diller Scofidio + Renfro's Blur Building is an architecture of atmosphere in flux and is almost invisible. Inside the Blur you are a witness to an anti-spectacle of form that confronts you with blank, indefinable space. Such space is temporary and is controlled only by contact with users. As air currents move behind occupants, they define the spaces of the building's form. Architecture needs to learn from and build on the ideas of provisional space. This is not to say that every design should be as intangible as the Blur Building, nor should every space be as dictating as Frank Lloyd Wright's Robie House, rather think about how people and time play roles in architecture. This is why Aldo Rossi sees the built environment as "the confrontation of a precise form with time and the elements, a confrontation which lasted until the form was in the process of combat (1)."

As occupants within interstitial space, we are always moving through but are rarely stopping within it as our destination. The lack of thought during the design process and the transitional nature of in-between space, allow it to pass by unnoticed. Instead we use the space conventionally, when it has the potential to be so much more. In order to achieve this, the built environment needs to step in. What is fascinating about interstitial spaces are not their particular forms, but how people have the ability to mold them. Thus buildings are static until they are occupied. Architecture does not need to be selfish, it simply needs to understand its role in the larger system. Mark Rakatansky writes, "Architecture that ignores the everyday... allows itself to be ignored everyday (2)." It seems that so often we forget about the goal of architecture - to create space for people. This leaves many caught in the middle of the push and pull of form, function, client, and aesthetics. Architecture can bring the best out of us when it focuses, not on form, but on people. By prioritizing people higher within the design than form, there are opportunities for the design to transcend beyond its literal walls.