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I, Michael D Rogovin, hereby submit this original work as part of the requirements for the degree of Master of Architecture in Architecture.

It is entitled:
The Remnat City

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Abstract:

Urban revitalization has pushed to reclaim Cincinnati’s once barren urban core, condensing people, commerce and leisure into the rigid constraints of a 19th century fabric. As a consequence, remnants of the city’s historic fabric have left a patchwork of underutilized and otherwise vacant space. This thesis proposes injecting new life into this forgotten territory, creating a structured network to engage the physical make up of Over the Rhine. In so doing, a new landscape is formed to challenge the implicit hierarchy of space and explicit tethers which relegate the public realm to the ground. The resulting typological study will provide a means by which the city can weave its architecture legacy with the ever changing condition of society. The resulting architectural intervention illuminates residual province of the city, reclaiming it through the creation of a public space.
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Urban revitalization has pushed to reclaim the once barren urban core, condensing people, commerce and leisure into the rigid constraints of a 19th century fabric. At the same time, the needs and expectations of society are rapidly evolving as technology permeates our lives. Such change runs counter to the immutable nature of the physical city. As a consequence there is a built in tension between the architectural legacy of the city and societal progress. Further, gentrification shifts the balance of social strata, favoring the wealthy as market forces seek to best capitalize on the financial opportunity. As a result, urban renewal leaves the physical territory of the city with an unresolved strain on space, control, and vision.

The material province of the city is finite in nature. What of it there is has been neatly subdivided by lines criss crossing the ground and walls reaching to the sky. But this remains a fixture of law while having little to do with spatial experience. Property lines do little to regulate perception. The physical constructs which impede path and view are far more impactful on how we understand the world around us. Consequently, it is the built environment that defines dominion within the urban condition.
Beyond the impenetrable face of masonry and brick, layering and vertical separation characterize our perception of ownership and the public realm. Moving upwards, horizontal banding establishes a programatic value and role for each layer above the ground. For example, increased elevation may offer superb views for an apartment but would have no street presence for a retailer. The ground on the other hand offers the most potential for public participation with diminishing returns moving upwards. What separates the man made elevated territories of the city from the ground ultimately comes down to access and awareness.

The urban environment is defined through private interest and the personal vision of stakeholders, leaving little more than the street and sidewalk to the public realm. As a result, space is prescribed with an agenda, whether that is to sell more consumer goods, advance a political motive, or promote a particular brand. The unprogrammed, ambiguous, and undefined have no place. It is, however, these exact moments where society can reconcile the fissures among social strata. Without an agenda, there is no target demographic and no one class is served above another. Space without an agenda invites inclusivity across cultural strata.
Redevelopment of Cincinnati’s Over-the-Rhine neighborhood has intensified over the last decade. The initial reinvestment effort was focused on the Vine Street Corridor south of Liberty Street, an area rebranded as the Gateway District. Although new development continues to spread, large swaths of residual land and building stock remain untouched. Given the profitability and pace of change in the area, it seems the continuation of this trend is imminent. In the mean time, however, this period of transition offers an opportunity to assess how this redevelopment is shaping the urban fabric for better or worse, and devise a strategy to fix its perceived shortcomings.

The concentrated reinvestment effort in OTR has repaired historic structures, attracted new residents and businesses, and repopulated large numbers of vacant buildings, however, such progress has come with a blind eye towards the needs of the existing residents. Instead, a target demographic was cultivated in the young and affluent, who were willing to pay a premium for brick walls and a manufactured sense of urban authenticity. While aspiring to meet the desires of this new population, developers and architects have sought to engage the city’s architectural legacy, merging the historic Italianate style of the neighborhood with modern materials and convenience. The result lacks temporal attachment to either the present time or the era which it remains referential to. When architecture is approached in this way, what is new and what is old becomes clouded, and the presence of the historic is diminished.
Fig. 03 - Findlay Market, Elder & Race, ≈ 1910

Fig. 04 - Findlay Market, Elder & Race, 1935
The district just south of Liberty Street provides a nearly clean canvas, not yet touched by redevelopment. This area is also home to one of Cincinnati’s greatest assets—Findlay Market, the region’s only remaining public market. Also of note are the bones of former breweries, chillers, and worker housing, remnants of the city’s pre-prohibition beer empires. Taken as a whole, only a fraction of that bygone era’s historic fabric remains. In its place, you can now find surface parking, vacant lots, and the occasional urban garden. Set against the historic fabric, these pockets of underutilized residual space provide an opportunity for a distinct architectural conversation between what a neighborhood once was and where it is heading. This thesis proposes a reactionary argument to the untethered market based redevelopment seen throughout the neighborhood.

Over-the-Rhine has a strong historic fabric that any new infill project will have to negotiate and reconcile with. The typical building typology is that of a late 19th century row house in the Italianate style. Each have unique ornamentation, commercial ground floor, and residential upper floors. Further, the neighborhood form is controlled through a historic overlay district that defines a set of guidelines for new construction. These dictate an overall building massing and height, as well as suggest some formal limitations. The built response to this has primarily taken the form of mimesis; new buildings adopt stylistic detailing that replicates the old. It is pertinent to question which guidelines offer a valid response to context, and which veer too close to replicating it.
Research:

In considering a new approach to public space, it is first important to catalogue the existing research available. The following work is of particular relevance here: Kristine Miller’s work Designs on the public, the private lives of New York’s Public spaces chronicles the interaction between the private and public spheres within New York’s publicly owned private spaces. Ally Ireson’s City Levels is interested in the horizontal banding that defines interaction within urban environments. While Manuel De Solà-Morales’ focus of In Favour of Public Space is on the components of good public space.
Designs On the Public:

Designs on the Public seeks to clarify how we view public space while contrasting this with the realities in which such spaces exist. Miller argues that our perception and ideals do not always align with how public space is used, who it is for, and who takes ownership of it. She is particularly interested in the privately owned public spaces (POPS) of New York, a result of public private partnership, though such partnerships are not unique to this city. The book overviews three examples that are often cited as successful POPS archetypes; Sony Plaza, the former IBM Atrium, and the Atrium at Trump Tower. These projects took advantage of a 1961 New York City Zoning Resolution which allowed developers to build beyond the standard height regulations provided the buildings have open, accessible public space. The intent was to create new public spaces without burdening the tax payers by incentivizing private entities. This brings into question whether the resulting spaces qualify as truly public, or if the public private model of development inherently impacts the identity of these spaces.¹

Much of what we define as public is an influx between waring political parties and private entities. The street provides a good example as it falls under public ownership yet in some contexts a pedestrian could be ticketed for walking across it. Despite these contradictions Miller goes to great strives to distinguish how we commonly define public space and the ideals we attach to them. The introductory paragraph makes this distinction abundantly clear:

“We tend to think of public space as having certain essential and obvious characteristics. We believe it is publicly owned, the opposite of private space. We believe it is open and accessible to everyone, where no one can be turned away. We imagine it as the setting for important civic events, where large groups of people come to celebrate, protest, and mourn. We see it as somehow part of democratic life—a place for speaking out and being heard.”

Miller’s exercise illustrates the gap between our beliefs and constructs around public space with reality. How we would like to think of public space is seemingly tinted by rose colored glasses. The actual definition is far more elusive as Miller struggles to define it in her own words. Miller’s attempts at a succinct definition comes far less easily: “Public space is a kind of hybrid of physical spaces and public spheres—is itself a kind of hybrid. It draws from the work of scholars from varied disciplines. It is based on the assumption that physical space is important to democratic public life.”

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3 Ibid, IX.
In Favour of Public Space:

Manuel De Solà-Morales is critical of how urban public space is defined in his essay within In Favour of Public Space. He puts forth that public space is the result of the collective condition that defines urbanity, not simply parks and civic space. From this perspective, all that is built within an urban environment has a directly impacts the public realm. “The buildings and streets of a city, the squares and monuments, factories and schools are, in good part, felt as belonging to the residents and, to the extent that they are affected by their functional and aesthetic characteristics, they are the object of citizens’ opinions and claims. In contrast, a rural cultivation or construction is free of this collective dependence.” Morales suggests that projects within an urban environment bare a responsibility beyond the scope of any single private entity’s interest.

Solà-Morales asserts a set of typologies with which to understand public space: tidying projects which serve to bring a space up to date or spruce them up, projects that expand the public sphere, projects that expand the collective nature of urban space, and finally projects that invent. It is both likely and preferable any designed space would fall into several of these categories, Within such, there is still the temptation for

“gratuitous gesturing and a great deal of gymnastics in forms striving for originality and surprise, as if public land were a blank page for the personal pleasure of the project designer. Undulations, ruptures, continuities and rows, screens and splodges, are combined - always out of the blue - as pieces of closed and self-referencing composition”

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5 Ibid, 27
City Levels:

City Levels asserts that our landscape is made up of a series of layers arranged vertically that form a sequence of interconnected horizontal levels. These are comprised of "the highest point, elevated territories, the street and beneath ground." Each is considered within its own chapter, but it is the street that has the strongest relationship with the public realm.

Barley and Ireson acknowledge they are not the first to consider the city vertically, but are actually just the most recent in a long lineage. Notably this includes the work of Le Corbusier in such works as A City for the Machine Age. What sets City Levels’ approach apart is that it rejects the early modernist notion of wiping the slate clean and create a new utopia. By contrast, Barley and Ireson stress that projects should seek to integrate within existing levels rather than imposing new.

Barley and Ireson describe the street as "a transit camp between two thresholds. One connects interior space (both public and private) to the city’s exterior connective circuitry; and the other allows movement from this pedestrian zone to the more rapid urban microclimate of vehicular movement." In other words, the street is integral to modernity, social life, and revolutionary change, but greater than that it is an "amorphous, interactive space where unassimilated otherness is most likely to be politically contained and tracked, and at the same time, most palpably perceivable as a reality of life." The streets value lies in that it is where we are most public, vocal, and exposed.

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7 Ibid, 9
8 Ibid, 67
9 Ibid, 68
In the mid 1920’s Le Corbusier presented his essay A City for the Machine Age, which was subsequently published within Ville Radieuse in 1933. The work contained his grand unrealized vision for city planning, wherein the city is reimagined vertically. Towers consolidate people and functions are compartmentalized through tiered programing. In this scheme, vehicular movement is pushed below ground, opening up space for public plazas above. Segregating the automobile and pedestrian aimed to maintain clear roadways and provide safe spaces for leisure, far from the dangers of high speed traffic. Massive multi-lane highways cut across the city, forming the central access and backbone of the city’s overall organizational structure.[10]

Although the machine age has come and gone, we have yet to see the city as Le Corbusier imagined. As we move through this digital era, a new age of robotics and automation is yet again at our doorstep. Consequently, there is no better time to consider the visions of a future past as we imagine what comes next. Certainly the central role of the automobile as Le Corbusier saw it can be called into question as environmental concerns and a new generation of autonomous transport take shape. The Fabric of today’s cities are shaped by the needs of the personal automobile whether be for storing, parking, or movement. A future of self driving cars could erase the need for all of this, ending the era of personal vehicle ownership in favour of network of on demand self driving cars, which have no need to stop and remain forever in motion. Such change could afford cities to reclaim parking for the pedestrian parks, and in so doing change the relationship of the pedestrian to the street.

The Metropol Parasol was conceived by the architect Jürgen Mayer in response to the discovery of ancient Roman ruins six meters below the Plaza de la Encarnación in Seville, Spain. Mayer claimed to have been inspired by the shade trees of a neighboring park and the undulating stone roof of the city’s gothic cathedral. This led him to his dramatic departure from the historic medieval architecture of the city and the adoption of an organic formal language. The resulting structure contains a museum, provides an elevated plaza, and houses the archeological site. Moreover, the Metropol Parasol seeks the status of icon for Seville, not unlike the Eiffel Tower does for Paris. It does this through its imposing scale and divergence from conventional architectural forms.
While Over the Rhine is far younger and significantly less dense than the conditions at the Plaza de la Encarnación, any design within the neighborhood would have to contend with a similarly rigid historic context and relative scale. The Metropol Parasol also carries the objective of illuminating the expanse of the elevated territory through its rooftop plaza. Beyond this, however, its wild geometry serves little purpose other than providing shade and as an attraction. The wooden louvres which make up the majority of the Parasol's volume act as purely a skin treatment and are structurally independent from the steal and concrete towers that support them. This distinction has been meticulously hidden through concrete walls, which rise up to hide the wood super structures resolution with the ground plain. In so doing, any human scale interaction is denied.\(^{11}\)

The Metropol Parasol provides a clear example of how a foreign architecture can be injected into an established urban fabric. Where this thesis departs from Mayer's work is through the single minded function of the parasols primary volume and its restrained engagement with the city. There is a clear contrast to the parasol's surroundings, however, the construction's supple form limits its interaction to context. Mayer quarantines his work well within the bounds of the plaza, establishing it as distinctly separate from the architectural legacy of Seville. The work of the this thesis by contrast is deliberately entwined into its context, binding the historic fabric to the new.

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The A8ernA derives its name from the reclaimed space underneath the A8 highway in Zaanstad, Netherlands. In salvaging the covered space left over by the overpass, the project has taken a net negative for the neighborhood and made it into a highly desirable space. Such a transformation is no small feat considering the typically strong association with the highway as dirty, a refuge for the homeless, and even dangerous. The architecture itself is minimal and focuses on what elements humanize the space; appropriate for a setting underneath a noisy obstruction.

While A8ernA was a response to an existing condition, the technique of programatic layering could be applied to new construction as well. Its spaces focus on light as a key tool in reclaiming the highway underbelly. Minimal built structures at the ground plane obstruct sunlight from penetrating, and a variety of electric lighting features keep the space well illuminated at night. Equally important, the programing responds to the desire of the community for useful shops and ample recreational open space. Finally, rather than fight its own mixed identity, the space embraces it. Concrete, a material indelibly linked to the inhuman scale of heavy infrastructure, is not hidden but deliberately celebrated. The same goes for Graffiti too. Where others may see it as a sign of neglect and disrepair, it adorns the walls as public art rather than desecration. As a result, A8ernA is well suited to illustrate the impact minimal built form and a well defined programatic identity can achieve.
The remnants of Cincinnati’s historic fabric have left a patchwork of underutilized and otherwise vacant space. This thesis proposes merging the diffused and disparate residual field of the ground plane with the rolling rooftops of the elevated territory. In so doing a landscape is formed to challenge the implicit hierarchy of space and explicit tethers which relegate the public realm to the ground. The resulting architectural intervention then reveals the leftover space within the city, reclaiming it through the creation of a public space which is willfully ambiguous in its use and intention. Ambiguity allows space to rid itself of an external or prescribed agenda, enabling it to be experienced through its own language of design and utility. Reclaiming space in this way permits each user to define their own interpretation. Therefore, the proposed architecture is deliberately vague, detached from convention and distinct from its context.

Ambiguous architecture and utility or purpose are not mutually exclusive, instead architecture that is free of implicit formal association can help to reset expectations. In so doing, architecture can promote an agenda beyond the assumptions we carry with us. This thesis aims to address the failings of Over-the-Rhine’s revitalization, a Cincinnati neighborhood in which the urban fabric is being reshaped through gentrification. The creation of new implicit barriers, both physical and financial, have dramatically changed OTR’s cultural composition and accessibility. Looking forward, without a radical shift in trajectory, redevelopment only promises further division within the neighborhood. The proposed architecture is a reactionary response which moves beyond the constraints of the ground plane, crossing over physical hurdles and connecting disparate urban territory, in so doing, allowing the public to access to space which would be otherwise out of reach.
Concept rendering - Architectural intervention is poured into context, filling and revealing interstitial space.
Beyond the constructs of brick and stone which hinder path and view, vertical separation defines access in the built environment. When elevated above the skyline of OTR, the neighborhood's consistent roofline and coherent formal language weave together forming a rolling landscape of rooftops. Unfortunately, this territory remains hidden from view and is rarely used for much other than hiding the architectural acne of air handlers, compressors, and exhaust vents. A handful of roofs have been reclaimed as outdoor patios but these remain little more than an oasis amongst as sea of asphalt shingle. This thesis strives to recover this lost territory through an architecture that encourages movement beyond the ground plain, bridging street corner to rooftop as one consistent landscape. As a result the domain of the elevated territory is merged with that of the ground, blurring distinctions of property line and threshold that otherwise define the city. Where the ground plane sees a blockade, an elevated vantage point sees a bridge, eliminating the constraints bound to surface.
This thesis intervenes at the neighborhood scale throughout the Findlay Market district of Cincinnati’s OTR. The residual voids in the urban environment are woven together with an encompassing open architectural strategy. This architecture resembles a cloth stretched and deformed to connect the leftover zones at each elevation within the city. Detached from the bounds of the ground plane, this new fluid form serves to unify the neighborhood through the insertion of movement, spatial experience, and as an architectural identity which subsequent development can build upon. Once freed from the constraints bound to elevation, the opens space can serve as an organizing structure in which new program can be injected, while street level movement remains unobstructed. Tying these elements together, paths, bridges, and the otherwise programmatically ambiguous architecture are employed as a method to define and link intervention from block to block, and from street to rooftop.

Beyond the direct programmatic implications of a large scale open space, micro housing is stitched into and punctuates the fluid landscape. OTR already has a rich stock of chic renovated apartments, but little by little is losing its affordable housing. Without getting into policy, architecture is left with few tools to address such a disparity. One viable method is through restraint on scale and overall square footage. Micro apartments allow more units to be fit into a given built volume than conventional residential development.

**Program:**
subsequently lowering the material cost per unit. Several of these modest units are scattered throughout, punctuating the otherwise consistent proposed fabric and provide a means for re-entry to the neighborhood for those forced out through gentrification. to engage the cities architectural legacy, merging the traditional Italianate style of the neighborhood with modern materials and convenience. The result lacks temporal attachment to either the present time or the era which it remains referential to. When architecture is approached in this way, what is new and what is old becomes clouded, and the presence of the historic is diminished.

The district just south of Liberty St. provides a nearly clean canvas, untouched by development. This area holds significance within Cincinnati as it also contains Findlay Market, a well loved historic food market. Beyond this remains, the bones of the former brewery’s, chillers, and worker housing of the cities pre-prohibition beer brewing empire. Taken as a whole, only a fraction of the historic fabric remains. In its place, you can now find surface parking, vacant lots, and the occasional urban garden. This makes for an idea space for an intervention with so much land lying in an underutilized state.
Conclusion:

This thesis is a reactionary architectural response to the market based development that has reshaped Over the Rhine in recent years, willfully defying the neighborhoods perceived trajectory. The result is a framework through which the city can establish a paradigm of collective ownership over the urban form for the community at large, as opposed to the domain of the individual land owner. A cohesive fluid architecture affords the neighborhood a unified identity to negotiate the historic legacy of the city with contemporary development. At the same time, movement unshackled from the ground plane reclaims the elevated territory as refuge from the constraints of the sporadically subdivided urban block.

Tensile architecture is both fluid and temporal by nature. As the proposed intervention bridges the ground and elevated plane, a symbiotic relationship between the historic legacy of OTR and the proposed fabric is established. The injected fabric is bound to the neighborhoods defining brick and stone, both as a literal and physical tether, diffusing the disjuncture of style and materiality, simultaneously revealing the forgotten territory of interstitial space within the urban realm. Further, while the rugged masonry of the late 1800’s invokes a timeless stoicism, fabric hung from above is capricious, tamed only by its anchors, forever shifting and breathing with the wind. As a result, this architecture is bound to the present, as it is forever changing and resettling. As building in the neighborhood continues, the fabric can reform to new constraints, adapting the times and needs of the community.
Intertwining the ground and roof tops does not come without challenge. Climbing forty to sixty feet takes a significant amount of space in order to maintain a walkable slope. An even more extensive run is required to be considered accessible for the disabled. This limits how often the proposed fabric can touch the ground without relying on stairs or elevators. While this thesis works to highlight OTR’s forgotten territory, its physical presence impose some limitations. Until the fabric has risen above a threshold of seven to eight feet from the ground, the space beneath is rendered unusable. Taken as a whole, far more space is added within the urban condition than is lost.

Next steps to further this investigation should consider how the fabric will adapt as subsequent construction occurs as well as what impact this proposal should have on future design criteria. Once the tensile structure is in place, it will play a pivotal role in how new architecture interacts with itself and the city. For this reason, a set of design guidelines should be developed to best take advantage of the new urban landscape. This would include structural considerations to support a modified tensile structure, vertical access, as well as aesthetic accommodation. As the paradigm of urban gentrification is faded out, we should consider methods for growth within the city that do not come at the expense of one group over another and seek to best utilize the physical and social assets of the city.
Bibliography:

In Favour of Public Space is a compilation of works that have won the European Prize for Urban Public space as well as a series of forward essays on the subject.

Manuel De Solà-Morales is critical of what makes urban public space in his essay within In Favour of Public Space. He puts forth that public space is the result of the collective condition that defines urbanity, and not simply the space of parks and civic institutions.

The city is made up of a series of layers arranged vertically that form a sequence of interconnected horizontal levels. Barley and Ireson stress projects should seek to integrate within existing levels rather than impose new.

Le Corbusier presented A City for the Machine Age that was subsequently published within Ville Radieuse in 1933. Contained is his grand unrealized vision for city planning.


Examines the Privately owned public spaces of New York City and the implication such hybrids have upon the way such spaces are perceived.