

**PICNICKING AT HOUSTON'S WATERWALL: THE PUBLIC
CONSTRUCTION OF CORPORATE SPACE**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis demonstrates how private, corporate space at the Williams Tower Park in Houston's Galleria area, (originally conceived as an office park that was closed to the public) has become a public place of leisure through its use. Ethnographic fieldwork conducted at the Williams Tower Park provides evidence contrary to what some scholars have heralded as the "end of public space," characterized by placeless and homogenized spaces. Instead, the corporate landscape of Houston is being culturally constructed through its unintended use by dog owners, fly fishers, wedding and quinceañera photographers, couples and families.

The analysis begins with Martin Heidegger's notion of *world* that shows how humans and the world that they inhabit are mutually constitutive. Given this premise, it is argued that the people who use the park (those who inhabit it, rather than those who designed it) constitute the park as a public place of leisure. This is brought about in two ways: 1) *regionalization* of space – the division of the park into different regions where certain activities are conducted; 2) *routinization* of activities – the same activities are carried out in certain regions at certain times repeatedly, creating a time-space routine. By carrying out activities in routine spaces and times, despite the constraints of the structure that is set up by the private corporation, the agency of the users has created the place as a leisurely place rather than an office park.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Spatiality and Temporality at Williams Tower Park

This thesis will argue that the public use of a locale has transformed it from a privately owned, corporate space into a public place of leisure. This transformation occurs through the construction of the place as a public place by its users in two ways: 1) division of the park into *regions* of space where specific activities are conducted in different regions; 2) time-space *routinization*—repeatedly carrying out the same activities in the same spaces. By carrying out activities in routine spaces and times at a site that is privately owned, and was initially closed to the public, the users have created the place as one that is open to public for leisurely activities, rather than corporately owned office space.

At the site in Houston, Hines Interests erected the skyscraper in 1982. It was then known as the Transco Tower, after the major tenants, Transco Energy, a gas pipeline company. The Transco company was taken over by Williams Corporation in 1995. The building was renamed Williams Tower in 1999. The park consists of three acres of land that is divided onto two sides of the street. On one side is the tower and a large lawn with rows of trees on either side. At the end of the lawn is a 64-foot fountain in a horseshoe shape, with an arched wall in front of it, facing the tower. The other side of the street has three lakes, and larger lawn area, with three other office buildings, and a small fountain.

When the Transco Tower was built, it was conceived as a monument to be admired from afar rather than a park to be enjoyed by the public, who were politely asked to “keep off the grass” (Houston Digest 1985). Gerald Hines, the property developer, admitted in an interview that the high response of the public to this park was rather unexpected (Gerald

Hines interview). The developers were envisioning a property that would provide a landmark tower and sculpture for admiration from a distance (Brady and Holmes 1985).

However, the people of Houston and the tourists who visit, choose to give more prominence to the landscaping than to the tower itself. Through their use of the space they are producing a different cultural environment than the one envisioned by the designers. Using the area around the building for fly fishing, kite-flying, or taking quinceañera¹ photographs, users make it their own. In doing so, the consumers of the space are, through everyday practices producing their own space. It is through this production that the private becomes public.

Hines Interests, the company who has continuously owned and managed the property, today claim that they had built the landscaping “all for the public” all along (Lee Barnard, personal communication). I argue that once the construction of the designed, material elements of the site were complete, it is through the agency of the public (through their routine use of the park in certain ways) that the park has been transformed into what it is today, a public space where the activities mentioned above are not only common, but also accepted by the property management.

In order to make my argument on how the space is transformed, I draw on three main theories: Martin Heidegger’s theory of spatiality from his work *Being and Time* (1962), and Miles Richardson’s (1982) theory on the construction of place. I also draw on Anthony Giddens’ structuration theory in order to understand how the public is able to transcend the rules that are set up by the corporation.

¹ *Quinceañeras* are fifteenth birthday celebrations for Mexican and Mexican-American women. They are similar to the Anglo-American *sweet sixteen*.

1.2 Heidegger's Theory of Space

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger distinguishes between different types of space: world-space and the space-of-action². Heidegger uses the term *Dasein* to refer to human beings, literally as “there-beings,” because he does not separate humans from the world they live in, so we are not simply beings, but we are beings that exist *in place*, there.

World-space can be conceived as a container, into which objects such as a building or a bench can be dropped. Objects can exist in world space, but world-space exists independently of these objects. World-space is an abstraction of the way we encounter space in our everyday activities, in which the things we deal with are near or far relative to us. This “nearness” or “farness” is how we first become familiar with what we can eventually understand as abstract space. That is, the very notion of abstract space is founded upon the nearness and farness with which we encounter things in our daily existence. In our day to day lives, we encounter space as the space-of-action.

The space-of-action has two aspects: *regions* and *Dasein*'s spatiality. The places in which we live—park, kitchen, office—have different *regions* which organize our activities and put our “*equipment*” (the tools or material objects that we use to conduct our activities) in context. My office has “equipment,” or “gear”—books, pens, computer—that is organized according to the spatiality of the way that I work. Similarly, there is equipment or gear at the Williams Tower, such as benches, lakes, shaded walkways, sidewalks, trees that are used to conduct various activities there. Regions are created at the park through various activities such as fly fishing dog walking, jogging etc. There are specific areas where each type of activity is regularly conducted. These regions were constituted through the involvement of

² Heidegger calls the space-of-action “workshop” space (1962:105). However, I use Arisaka's (1996) term space-of-action, since it is easier to follow.

the public with items of “gear” (material culture of the setting) as well as with each other. For instance, fly fishers noticed that certain lakes worked better for their casting, because it gave them enough room behind them to cast their lines, and they are usually found in that particular region. Also, since their arrival, dog owners or people with children keep out of this region so as to avoid the lines and hooks (this is further explored in section 3.6).

Dasein’s spatiality can only maintain itself in regions, and is founded on “de-severance” and “directionality.” De-severance is how we “make things available” to ourselves. According to Heidegger, we “take in space” by “making the farness vanish” and by “bringing things close” (Heidegger 139, 105). This reaching and moving is done through any actions that we take in the world. For instance, if I get up to reach for the remote control, I move from the region of the kitchen to the region of the living room, making the “farness” of the remote control vanish as I move. This process is “directional” because it is aimed in a direction that is determined by my concern (wanting to turn on the television), and by specific regions (kitchen, living room). My action is coordinated based on the regions of the kitchen and living room in order to become closer to the equipment that I intend to use.

De-severance, directionality and regionality are the ways that describe the spatiality of our Being-in-the World. *Being-in-the World* is the way that we humans exist. The structure of the world is interdependent on both humans and world. It is a system of relations that is already occurring. These are not structures of human consciousness that are imposed upon the world but rather structures within which we humans dwell concretely, not abstractly.

In *Being-in-the-world* (1991), Hubert Dreyfus examines two characteristics of the structure of the world, *involvement* and *interdependence* of Dasein and world. Involvement,

as referring to “equipment”, is *functioning*, which requires “fitting into a context of meaningful activity.” Dasein inhabits or dwells in these activities or practices and their equipment. In discussing the interdependence of Dasein and world, for Dreyfus “Significance is the background upon which entities can make sense and activities can have a point” (1991:97). This view would reduce the world to significance, and Dasein would not then be as dependant on the world as the world would be dependant on Dasein for its constitution. Heidegger would argue that rather than background, significance is the “relational whole of the signifying...that makes up the structure of the world—the structure of that wherein Dasein already is” (Heidegger 1962:120).

According to Dreyfus Heidegger failed to distinguish adequately between human spatiality in public space and the centered spatiality of every individual human being (1991:129). Yet Dreyfus does not clarify which of Heidegger’s later works he is referring to. According to my reading of Heidegger, the centered spatiality of each individual human being is not to be distinguished from the public space, because human spatiality can necessarily occur only within public space – there is no spatiality without public space. This is because Dasein’s individual spatiality requires the nearness and farness of equipment, features that can only arise from an engaged Dasein, which can only occur in public space.

An individual Dasein, even though it may have its own spatiality, can only have this spatiality within a public space. Any space that is inhabited by Dasein is by definition public. Dasein is *in the world*, this is the *where* of Dasein, and the world is not created by Dasein, but rather it is a public, shared world. Philosopher Edward Casey (1997:249) states, “orientation is a conjoint production, requiring both familiarity with a region and Dasein’s directional powers. As such it is a paradigm of the delicate balance Heidegger wishes to

strike between the contribution of the human subject and the pre-givenness of its surroundings.”

The “pre-givenness” that Casey refers to is what cultural anthropologist and geographer Miles Richardson(1982) calls the “preliminary definition” of the place. Richardson, writing about the contrast between being-in the worlds of the plaza and the market in Cartago, Costa Rica, unravels the differences between the two by beginning with “what differentiates the two places, that is the material culture” (Richardson 1982: 422). The following section examines how the material culture is incorporated into a situation through human interaction and signification in order to create a place.

1.3 Construction of Public Place

Richardson outlines three components to this process: **one** is the preliminary definition supplied by the material culture of an existing setting. In this case, that would be the architecture and design components such as shaded areas, lakes, walkways, benches, etc. **Another** component is the interaction occurring within that setting. This would be both interactions between people and how people engage with the material aspects of the setting. The **third** component is the image emerging out of the interaction and completing the definition by restating that situation’s sense of place.

At this site, I argue that the image that emerges from the above interactions, an image of a public place, returns to re-define the setting as public. People using the space define it as much as the structure of the space would define the activities within it. This is the living out of the tension (using Heidegger’s terminology) between 1) the involvement in an already constituted region in which we come across items, and 2) the creation of a coherent

equipmental context or region by an individual Dasein through directional de-severance (i.e. making close).

We have already seen how this tension plays out in the creation of the region for fly fishing at the park. Not only are the fly fishers incorporating the material environment (the lakes and the open space behind) into the region they are creating, but the place is also in part defined as the fly fishing area—the area where if you were to venture with children or dogs, you would have to be on the lookout for lines being cast—because of their presence and their activity.

Beyond the division of the park into regions, or the *regionalization* of the space, the place is also constructed as public through the *routinization* of activities. By routinization, I mean the repetition of activities in the same regions at the same times, creating a time-space routine. The following section examines how the space is structured by the corporation, and also how the public is able to get around and work within this structure in order to create the regions and routines that transform the space.

1.4 Structure and Routinization

Anthony Giddens examines the interactions between capable human *agents* and social systems and *structures*—which are generally thought of as constraining agency by establishing parameters within which human agency could operate. Instead, he argues that structure is both enabling and constraining, and that structure is only present in the moments of *interaction* through which it is either reproduced or transformed.

At the Williams Tower Park, the property management has set up a structure or set of rules that are intended to control or constrain the behavior of people who use the site. These rules are supposed to prohibit certain activities. For instance, according to the official rules,

no dogs are permitted in the park. However, the security guards enforce this rule much more consistently on the side of the street near the tower, where the lawn is better manicured.

When dog owners are on the side of the lakes, the rule is not enforced. Thus, while there is a structure in place defining the rules by which the public can use the space, the variable enforcement of those rules, which requires the interaction of the security staff with the dog owners, results in the transformation of the structure. The dog owners, like other groups at the park, have a time-space routine in their activities—they are always found at the lake closest to the street on weekend mornings. As a result of continued interaction with the dog owners, the security staff has become more sympathetic to their desire for a dog park. Dog owners are therefore tacitly permitted to walk their dogs on the property as long as they stay off the lawn in front of the tower. This is an example of how routinization of activities leads to the reconstitution of the park as a place where dogs are permitted, if only in one particular area of the property. This image of the property as one where city residents bring their dogs on the weekend is *not* what the developers had in mind when they built the landscaping.

The next chapter examines the vision of the designers in building this space, and how the space is structured by the property management. That is the first step in the creation of the place, the designed, material elements of the setting. Chapter Three discusses the routines and regions created through the interactions of different groups who visit the site, both with the designed elements of the space, and with each other. Chapter four examines the creation of the place as a landscape of leisure and tourism. This is not how corporate office space is typically envisioned, yet the large numbers of people at the park has drawn several vendors, such as rose-peddlers and ice-cream sellers. This chapter illustrates how the image of the place as public (that is constructed through the activities discussed in Chapter Three) returns

to re-define the setting as a landscape of leisure and tourism, despite its original conception as corporate office space.

1.5 Introduction to Literature Review

The literature presented here covers four broad themes related to my own inquiry: public and private space, urban plazas, the purported “end of public space”(Mitchell; Zukin, Sorkin), and the latinization of urban space. I begin with an overview of four ethnographies of plazas that are closest to my own work. This is followed up with a discussion of the distinction between private and public space. I then critique cultural geographic literature on what is called the “end of public space.” My ethnographic work demonstrates that theories on the apparent end of public space are based more on a fear of the homogenization of space than a firm grounding in ethnographic data. Finally, I briefly examine the creation of Latino urbanism in terms of my own project.

In order to briefly clarify the distinction between the terms *space* and *place*, I follow Yi-Fu Tuan, who interprets *place* as “humanized space.” The city is viewed as a *place* by its inhabitants, for whom the city holds particular meanings, whereas it is a *space* to plan for the planners (Taylor 2000; see also Tuan 1977). My thesis takes a particular locale, Williams Tower Park, and examines its transformation from *space* into *place*, and the tensions between the different constructions of *space* and *place* of this locale.

1.5.1. Ethnographies of Urban Plazas

Four ethnographies of plazas that are relevant to my work are examined here: William Whyte’s study of parks in New York City; a study of eight corporate plazas in Los

Angeles and San Francisco, by Banerjee and Loukaitou-Sideris; Miles Richardson's ethnography of a plaza in Costa Rica; and SETHA LOW's work on Plazas in Costa Rica.

William Whyte was commissioned by the New York City Planning Commission to study plaza use and help draft a comprehensive design plan for the city. The Street Life Project was aimed at creating plazas that were better used by writing a new code for the city that incorporated Whyte's findings: "If we could find out why the good places worked and the bad ones didn't and come up with tight guidelines, there would be a new code" (Whyte 1988). Whyte is interested in why people are drawn to certain plazas and not others. In my fieldwork, I found that if people did not **use** the Williams Tower Park, it would remain private. This is why Whyte's findings are important for me to examine here. Some of his conclusions do match my own in terms of the reasons for attraction of the public to the Williams Tower Park. However, I find that Whyte subsumes all his findings in more general terms, whereas the different groups I studied at my site were often drawn to the park for very different reasons.

Since he is working to create better designs, Whyte's focus is on material elements of the setting, and how people interact with these. He does note that "the best used plazas are sociable places, with a higher proportion of couples and groups that you will find in less-used places." This sentiment was echoed with some of the groups at the Williams Tower Plaza, such as the dogowners and fly fishers, who would say that the presence of other dog owners and fly fishers was important to their feeling of being welcome at the plaza.

Whyte's other conclusions such as the amount of what he calls "sittable space" and shape of the plaza space seem less relevant to my study. I'll briefly share some of the diversity of the design elements that users at the Williams Tower found attractive. For the fly

fishers, factors such as the lack of a fence, the amount of water in the lakes, and wide space for casting were some important elements. Dog owners were also not interested in the amount of “sittable space”. Families valued most the idea that the space was enclosed enough to keep an eye on the children, yet open enough for the children to play football and fly kites. Couples, on the other hand were more interested in the aesthetic pleasure they derived from being near the fountain when it was lit up at night. The place was perceived as being romantic because of the waterfall, carriage rides, and rose sellers. In sum, while the design elements of the plaza are important determinants of who uses the space and how well it is used, it is difficult to make a correlation between any *single* element, such as benches, and the use of the space by *all* the visitors to the site. Instead, I found that there are different groups who value different material elements of the designed space.

As architects, like William Whyte, interested in improving the design of downtown spaces, Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris and Tidrib Banerjee examined eight corporate plazas in Los Angeles and San Francisco (Loukaitou-Sideris and Banerjee 1992). These plazas were studied from two different perspectives:

1. their purpose and performance—that is, their intended and actual use
2. the process—negotiation, bargaining, regulation—through which they were designed and implemented.

The first of these perspectives is similar to my own focus on the use of the plaza at Williams Tower Park. In terms of the second perspective, their findings can be broadly summarized as noting that downtown appears to be an industry that is a product of complex negotiations between joint private and public sector initiatives.

The authors note that corporate plazas in their study, like other downtown public spaces (such as arcades, gallerias, promenades, pedways, public arts, art museums, cultural

facilities, amphitheatres) are meant to “create amenities for its downtown workers, as well as for its corporate clients and visitors” (Loukaitou-Sideris and Banerjee 1992: 3). “The downtowns now compete with each other for ‘signature buildings’ of famous architects, innovative ‘theme park’ type settings, shopping malls, residential population, and the like” (Loukaitou-Sideris and Banerjee 1992: 3). Phillip Johnson, one of the Transco Tower architects, is indeed a prominent American architect. He is often cited as hailing both the modern and postmodern movements in architecture. Transco Tower would certainly be one of these “signature buildings” for Houston. I examine briefly the methods and findings that emerge from this study of eight plazas, which appears to be the most comprehensive study of urban plazas in the U.S.

Banerjee and Loukaitou-Sideris used interviews of corporate staff in order to understand the purpose of the plazas and how they have been created. Then “field observations,” which consisted of photo sweeps, and user interviews were conducted to “assess how these plazas are used and experienced” (Loukaitou-Sideris and Banerjee 1992:6). Photos were taken for two hours from different angles etc. to determine numbers and genders of the people on each site. As a result of their limited field methods, although they focused on the use of the plazas, these authors did not go further than to identify “eight common types of activities: standing, sitting, walking, eating, reading, working, taking pictures, meeting friends.” The authors also noted that the private sector is aware of the elements of the plazas such as safety, cleanliness, order etc. that are appreciated by its users, and markets the plazas to cover the needs of its clientele (152). At the Williams Tower, however, as I will show (section 2.3), the developers did not expect such a high degree of public interest in the site, and did not cater the site to the use of the public.

Banerjee and Loukaitou-Sideris are designers who like William Whyte, created their study in order to improve the design of corporate plazas. Although they do make some interesting observations about how the space is used, they are less interested in the people using the space than they are in improving the material elements of the design.

Miles Richardson's ethnographic writing on Cartago, Costa Rica is an ethnography of place, in which the participants in the construction of the place, as well as the material elements, are key to the study. Richardson demonstrates how the material culture of the town's market and plaza are incorporated into social situations in order to create places (Richardson 1982: 421). He examines how the two places exhibit two modes of existence, or being-in-the-world:

in the market, a factlike world is constructed; in the plaza, a more aesthetic one emerges. How is this accomplished? How do people transform simply being there physically to being in two distinct worlds? The answers would seem to lie in what differentiates the two places, that is, the material culture. That being the case, we need to consider the nature of the material culture and its relationship to the process of world building (Richardson 1982:421).

Material culture, Richardson argues, not only provides the physical setting for activities, it is not simply there, but it "becomes a 'scene', or better, an opened text, whose narrative we read even as we interact" (Richardson 1982:422). Interactions at the market and the plaza (both between people and between the material culture and people) are critical elements of the constructions of these places as a market or a plaza. And, Richardson argues, it is only *through* these different types of interactions that the material elements emerge as *places*—market or plaza.

Materially, the market is indoors and square, the plaza is outdoors and circular. "The market concentrates individuals into narrow streams flowing past stationary vendors, and the plaza distributes people into clusters focused primarily on the fountain" (Richardson

1982:426). Interactions that are first defined and then facilitated by the material setting are “for the market, engaged participation, intense action and offstage performance; and for the plaza, disengaged observation, serene action, and onstage performance” (Richardson 1982:430). These interactions lead to the construction of the market as a place where nature is a commodity—“everything from tomatoes to love has a price,” and by contrast, in the plaza, nature has been tamed and arranged according to a rational plan (Richardson 1982:432). Richardson’s writing illuminates the *process* of the construction of the plaza and the market as places (as elaborated in sections 1.2.1 and 1.2.2). Richardson’s work is unique in his particular attention to both material culture and the social construction of place.

Setha Low’s book *On the Plaza*, is also an ethnographic study of two Plazas in Costa Rica. Based on fieldwork she conducted over a period of ten years. Setha Low claims that her example “helps to explain why plazas arbitrarily located in North American cultural contexts are often not successful as socially or politically vibrant places” (xiv). I would argue that she, like the other authors (Mitchell, Sorkin, Zukin) discussed in the section on the End of Public Space (section 1.3.3), is underestimating the political aspect of North American plazas. This ethnographic project seeks to answer a question that Low feels is not satisfactorily addressed in her own work, that is, “What are the middle range connections between the theories of the social production of space and the raw ethnographies?” (xiv). Through a study of the routinization and regionalization of activities, I directly connect my ethnographic observations (both spatial and temporal) with theories on the broader scale social production of space.

Low draws on a range of theorists to analyze her ethnographic data, and proposes:

that urban public space reflects the cultural order, not through a one-to-one correspondence between spatial arrangements and meaning, but through a

complex culture-making process in which cultural representations are produced, manipulated and understood by designers, politicians, users and commentators within changing historical, economic, and sociopolitical contexts. These spatial/cultural representations express the power relations between different groups and reflect ongoing patterns of cultural change. (50)

Rather than *reflecting* the cultural order, my thesis suggests that not only is urban public space constituted by the cultural order, but the cultural order is itself produced through urban public space. In other words, following the work of Miles Richardson, I argue that public space and cultural order are mutually constitutive.

Low's recently published ethnography is disappointing since she presents various ways that landscapes have been analyzed without clearly demonstrating any theoretical contributions of her own case study. Low does not present a methodology for the study of plazas that could be applied to other work, and her own study has such broad goals, that even over ten years of ethnography, she feels that she has fallen short of achieving them. My thesis takes a single element of what Low describes as a complex culture making process, the users, and examines their role in the production of place through the routinization and regionalization of space.

1.5.2. Private/Public Space

Notions of public and private within geography have been articulated and understood on two levels: first in terms of abstract ideas about the nature of the public, and second in terms of the concrete spaces in which public and private realms have been intermingled (Light and Smith 1998:1). I can also add to this a third level, the study of the "end of public space" (Sorkin 1992), which I address separately in section 1.3.3.

In his *Structural Transformation*, the philosopher Jurgen Habermas develops a historically specific understanding of the modern category of public-ness. The bourgeois

public sphere, which he examines in this book, is defined as “the public of private individuals who join debate of issues bearing on state authority” (Calhoun 1994: 6). The private realm, in contrast, is “one of freedom that has to be defended against the domination of the state” (Calhoun 1994: 7). Habermas has been critiqued by feminist scholars for his overly idealistic vision of public, in which the exclusion of women and other minority groups is hidden from view (Fraser, Mansbridge cited in Killian 1998; Duncan 1996).

A more concrete definition of the public sphere is a site of contestation and debate. The “public square” is the plaza, or the place where people gather to talk among themselves, and talk back to the state or the ruler who is up on the balcony overlooking the plaza, addressing the people. It is the site of heteroglossia and conflict, and the place where history is enacted (Bhaktin, cited in Light and Smith 1998:2).

The cultural context of any social activity includes the power relations that structure the space where the activities are conducted as either private or public. Ted Killian argues that public and private are not characteristics of space, but expressions of power relationships in space, and hence both exist in every space (Killian 1998: 116). The publicness of spaces (as noted by Don Mitchell) is a process of negotiation through a dialectical relationship between “visions that have been held, on the one hand, by those who seek order and control and on the other, by those who seek places for oppositional political activity and unmediated interaction” (Mitchell 1995: 127). The contestation of the publicness or privateness of spaces then, is the contestation of the control that is exerted by some groups in order to allow accessibility only to certain cultural groups and acceptability only to certain cultural activities within these spaces.

Because the site that I am working on is privately owned, the management defines what is acceptable to them on that space. People who use the park are challenging those rules, and by doing so they are exerting their agency. If the same people were on public property, different rules would apply. Furthermore, if their activities fall within the acceptability range of those who are trying to control the space then they may not be exerting their agency to quite the same degree.

The distinction between public and private is important in that it identifies the elements of control and forces that challenge that control through active use of the space. Because the public was not initially welcome on this property, all of their activities at the site represent a challenge to the original exertion of control by the owners—for example when they asked the public to “keep off the grass at Transco” (Houston Chronicle, 1995). However, as I indicate, there are certain activities, such as walking dogs, that further challenge the authority, because these are expressly prohibited through the posting of signs that indicate that dogs are not allowed on the property. Williams Tower Park is a private park that is strictly controlled and monitored and there are different degrees of agency exerted by the public who use this park as though it were public space that is open to a wider range of activities.

1.5.3. The End of Public Space

Much of the literature on corporate space is characterized by an underlying cynicism about the possibility of creating a truly public space within this realm (Mitchell 1995; Sorkin 1992; Zukin 1991). The assumption is that corporate spaces, such as malls and corporate plazas are homogenous, undifferentiated spaces that could be any place on the globe. Even non-corporate public spaces are assumed to follow this trend, being viewed as becoming

apolitical: “Increasing privatization, commercialization and aestheticization of public space has led to a tendency to depoliticize space and shrink public spheres”(Duncan 1996).

Relph describes this phenomenon, referred to as *placelessness* as “a widespread and familiar sentiment that the localism and variety of the places and landscapes that characterized preindustrial societies and unselfconscious, handicraft cultures are being diminished and perhaps eradicated. In their stead, we are creating ...’a flatscape’, lacking intentional depth and providing possibilities only for commonplace and mediocre experiences.” (Relph 1983: 78). Globalization is the cause of placelessness. According to Relph, “look-alike landscapes” result from improved communications and increased mobility and imitation...” Beyond the placelessness of corporate spaces, it is implicit that the *agency* of the public within corporate space is unworthy of attention, because it may be limited through corporate control and surveillance. Instead, I will argue that through the everyday use of space at the Williams corporate plaza, users assert their own agency in the creation of the place. The place that is created, as I will demonstrate, is one that is *neither* ageographic nor placeless.

Michael Sorkin argues for the emergence of a new kind of city which he calls an ageographic city—“a city without a place attached to it” (Sorkin 1992: xi). Three characteristics mark this type of city:

1. The dissipation of all stable relations to local physical and cultural geography, the loosening of ties to any specific space. Uniformity of globalized capital rather than differentiated, localized, traditional cities.
2. An obsession with security, surveillance and new modes of segregation.
3. It is a city of simulations, preoccupied with reproduction, “a television city, city as theme park,” a city whose design is based in the idea of “pure imageability, oblivious to the needs and traditions of those who inhabit it” (Sorkin 1992: xiv).

In each of the above, Sorkin is concerned with the *design* elements of the city rather than their *use*. In order to fully understand urban space, the use of the space cannot be neglected.

In what follows, I apply the use of space to Sorkin's scheme to illustrate that the purported ageographic city may well be designed as such, but it is necessarily attached to a place when we examine its use. To begin with the first, the uniformity of globalized cities, I argue that although places may appear to be uniformly globalized because their design is uniform, that this uniformity is not possible to achieve in the different ways the space may be used. Sorkin suggests that locality may be acknowledged only through material elements, such as "the inclusion of the *croque-monsieur* at the McDonald's on the Boul' Miche or the Cajun martini at the airport lounge in New Orleans" (Sorkin 1992: xii). He is uninterested in elements of the space which the designers may not control. Take a Starbucks in India, and compare it to one in the United States: customers at the Starbucks in India will necessarily be different from those in United States—how they relate to each other, how close or far they sit from each other, how friendly they are to the waitstaff, all contribute to how the space is localized. If the use of space is not examined, it would appear that local elements of places are diminishing. By including how the spaces are used, a more complete picture of place that includes both global design and local use emerges.

The next two characteristics also, obsession with security, surveillance, and segregation are also concerns of the designers. As Sorkin himself notes, the ideas in the design of such a city are "oblivious to the needs and traditions of those who inhabit it" (Sorkin 1992: xiv). If designers are obsessed with security and segregation, the assumption that Sorkin makes is that these architects and corporations are successfully *controlling* the

use of the space in terms of accessibility to the space and what the corporation considers appropriate use of space. In this thesis, I am primarily concerned with how spaces are *actually used* by people in the city, in some senses almost regardless of the designers' intent, but I particularly take note when the designers' intentions clash with the ways that the space is inhabited, since this indicates a greater degree of agency on the part of the users.

Don Mitchell, in his study of People's Park in Berkeley, California also fears the "end of public space" (Mitchell 1995). Unlike Sorkin, in his view of public space, Mitchell does take into consideration both the perspectives of the architects and designers, as well as the users of the space. He does this by providing two "visions" of public space: in the first, "public space is taken and remade by political actors; it is politicized at its very core;" in the second, public space is "planned, orderly, and safe," "a controlled retreat where a properly behaved public might experience the spectacle of the city" (Mitchell 1995: 115). However, Mitchell excludes a third view of public space, that combines elements of the above two, where *regulated* space is *appropriated*. The corporate space that I studied in Houston, as I will show, would fall into this third category.

Mitchell's Neo Marxist perspective of public space is based on a struggle between the designers and architects on the one hand, and the users of the space on the other:

Whatever the origins of any public space, its status as 'public' is created and maintained through the ongoing opposition of visions that have been held, on the one hand, by those who seek order and control and, on the other, by those who seek places for oppositional political activity and unmediated interaction (Mitchell 1995: 115).

Thus, public space is not an inherent quality of the space itself, a space is rather created as public, in part through its use. Mitchell notes that often this use is in direct contrast to what the space was intended to be used for, creating a struggle between two opposing

forces. It is this struggle, according to Mitchell, which shapes the space, and it is an ongoing creation.

When speaking of spaces like malls and corporate plazas, Mitchell refuses to grant the public the agency which they deserve. Rather than allowing them to be a part of the struggle described above, he refers to “a theater set in which a pacified public basks in the grandeur of a carefully orchestrated corporate spectacle” (Crilley 1993:147, cited in Mitchell 1995: 120.) If indeed the status of public space is created and maintained through the *opposition* between the visions of the public and those seeking order and control, then it follows that the public cannot be reduced to a ‘pacified public’. Their presence and creation of the place as public is vital, as much so as the design is. The author has escaped the trap of seeing a landscape as something that is fixed, pre -designed, into which people are then introduced, but he also assumes a dichotomy between what he would see as the powerful designers versus the powerless public. Instead, I suggest that there is an ongoing tension between the property management and the public that is part of the production of the space.

Sharon Zukin, in a similar vein, expresses the loss of a sense of place in terms of what used to be the public spaces of corporations. She focuses on what she terms “Landscapes of Power” and their shifting uses. However, she claims, “as a market culture has finally been exported from America around the world, it poses most danger to the cultural values of place” (Zukin 1991: 5). Historically, Zukin claims, the social institutions of market and places supported each other. Since the decades following the French Revolution, however, entrepreneurialism led to a process whereby “place began to internalize market culture”(Zukin 1991:5). I would argue that a so-called market culture cannot pose *danger* to the cultural values of place. If we are becoming more commercially oriented, then those

cultural values will be reflected in and created through our landscapes, and they are part of our cultural values of place. My ethnographic data would confirm that corporate culture has indeed changed the culture of public space. However, I would argue that it is important to examine how people get around the rules that are dictated by corporate culture, since it is not necessarily an internalization of corporate culture if the public is using corporate space in unintended ways. Also, we need a more nuanced understanding of what constitutes public places. This understanding cannot be achieved by excluding market or corporate elements, or viewing them as threatening elements, but it requires a deeper analysis based on ethnographic fieldwork of contemporary landscapes. Since I find that there is significant overlap between what is corporate and public at my site, this is likely to also be true of other corporate parks and plazas. Thus, neither a strict division of corporate space and public place, nor an assumption that public places are subsumed within corporate culture are necessarily analytically useful.

1.5.4. Ethnoscapes of Latino Urbanism

Several authors have written about the “Latinization” of U.S. cities (Davis, Valle and Torres). Davis particularly draws attention to the importance of “putting Latinos where they belong: in the center of debate about the future of the U.S. big city.” The literature on this theme focuses on larger cities, such as New York, Los Angeles and Chicago. Much of this work could be applied to Houston, where relatively little has been written about changes in the landscape brought on by Latinos.

Davis’ work is perceptive, rich in detail and set in tangible examples. However, by using language like “tropicalizing cold urban space” and “spicing the city” in reference to Latinos, rather than putting Latinos at the center, he is instead exoticizing and othering them

in his writing. My own work is more ethnography of place than ethnic geography. I agree with Davis, Valle and Torres that Latinos are reshaping the U.S. metropolis in important ways that are worthy of notice. The couples and families (see section 3.4) at my research site were primarily Latino but various other groups, such as dog owners and fly fishers were not. Davis argues that Latino use of public space is distinct from other groups:

“the social reproduction of *latinidad*, however defined, presupposes a rich proliferation of public space. The most intense and creative convergence of Ibero-Mediterranean and Meso-American cultures is precisely their shared conviction that civilized society is constituted in the daily intercourse of the *plaza* and *mercado*...Latin American immigrants and their children, perhaps more than any other element in the population, exult in playgrounds, parks, squares, libraries and other endangered species of US public space, and thus form one of the most important constituencies for the preservation of our urban commons” (Davis 2000:65).

The reproduction of *latinidad* can certainly be seen at the Williams tower park, where space that is not defined as public is in fact used as a public park by Latinos. However, because Latinos are not alone in their construction of the park as public, it would be an oversimplification to view this as primarily a Latino phenomenon. However, we can be assured that the designers of this space would never have conceived of its popularity as a spot for quinceañera photography. The following chapter examines the vision of the designers and architects as well as the developer, in the conception of this space, and explores the types of public involvement they envisioned on this site before it was built. But first, it is necessary to explain how my fieldwork methods and some of the challenges I was presented with as I attempted to collect data at this site.

1.6 Fieldwork Methods and the Challenge of Accessibility

The ethnographic methods that I chose are important because they are indicative of the atmosphere at the site in terms of the relationship between the public and the security. A

tenseness existed just under the surface, something that a lack of fences and barriers could not hide. (I explore this tension further in section 2.3; this discussion is limited to how it affected my techniques). I begin with a description of my ethnographic methods, and then address some of the ethical implications of the choices in my research strategy. The first of these choices came up early in my fieldwork, when I realized that my research would need to be covert in some sense. I also discuss why I chose to use the actual first name of my key informant.

1.6.1 Fieldwork Description

I conducted the bulk of my field research in Houston from June through August of 2000. I obtained data through participant observation and interviews conducted during this time period. I began with a week of observation over Spring Break, in April 2000 at different times of the day, and different days of the week. This first week I did not conduct any interviews, but I began with intensive observation.

The majority of my interviewees were visitors to the site. These interviews were loosely structured. I took notes on a small 3” by 5” notepad during the interview, sometimes immediately after, if the conversation had begun spontaneously. There were three key questions that I tried to ask every interviewee, where they had come from; what made them choose to come to this location; and whether they were aware that this was privately owned land – this was generally something I would approach indirectly. I would ask, “Do you think this is a city park?” or “Do you think someone might ask us to leave?” In answering those three questions, further questions would develop or people would just talk about the site, and I would take notes and then ask more questions. I would try to understand how people viewed the site, particularly to what extent it was “theirs.” Often I would just be observing

and taking notes, or taking a break, sitting on a bench, waiting for a ride home, and someone would start a conversation with me. In these cases, I would not take notes until immediately after the conversation was over, because the naturalness of the conversation would have been lost if I pulled out my notepad from my back pocket.

1.6.2 Secrets from the Security

My field methods were structured based on what I observed during this first week. A key concern that developed was that my fieldwork would have to be hidden from the security personnel. This meant that my field research was covert in some sense. Although the management and security were not made aware of my research, it was not hidden from the people who visited the site. The public that I interviewed was aware of my project. I would have felt more comfortable with official permission to conduct my studies, but if this permission was denied, access to this site would have been impossible. I was not willing to take that risk, particularly after the following encounter that I had observed within the first two days of my arrival at the site.

A young woman in her late teens was openly interviewing people at the site. She carried a video camera and a clip-on microphone for her interviewees, and boasted a press pass at the collar of her black leather jacket. She walked onto the site, video-taped the scenery, the waterfall and trees. I was very curious about what she was doing, and watched (from the other side of the lawn) as she interviewed a young man. She then came up to me and introduced herself as a journalism student doing a project on “ideas for cheap or free dates in Houston.” She politely asked for an interview, and I agreed. Then she proceeded to ask me some questions about what I thought was appealing about the place to people looking for somewhere to go for a date that would be free of charges. The interview could not have

lasted more than five minutes. At the end of it, she thanked me, and was about to head towards another individual when the security pulled up in a golf cart. He stopped her, and after a brief exchange between them, he left. I asked her what he had said. "You know, he actually asked me to leave..." She was surprised and offended. She told me that she would have needed to talk to the management, fill out forms for permission and pay a fee to conduct research of any kind, and he had added that she would most likely not be granted the permission to do so.

This was the central incident, although there were a few others, that cautioned me against revealing my intentions to the security (at the cost of losing access to my research site), and it also meant that my relationship with the security was often tense. The few times that I was able to talk to the security it was through my key informant, George (whom I discuss in the next section, 1.4.3, and more fully in section 3.1), who was a regular visitor to the site and already good friends with them. If George and I were talking, and one of his security friends stopped by and talked to him, I would feel comfortable getting involved in the conversation, and even steering it towards my research questions. However, I did not outright ask any of the security personnel for interviews. Luckily, I encountered an ex-security guard, Kevin who was visiting with his children one afternoon. Kevin was kind enough to allow me a one-hour interview with him.

Hester Parr argues that "fieldwork is always articulated through body spaces and that geographers can gain much from reflection on ethnographic embodiment" (Parr 2001: 1). In her work, she discusses a "more-or-less conscious 'making' of the body as a research tool in relation to public space" (Parr 2001). As a covert ethnographic strategy, she adopted bodily behaviors of some of the mentally ill people with whom she was doing her research. She

acknowledges the constructed nature of her ethnographic presence by smoking her cigarette with a consciously shaking hand, and her arm curled in towards her body combined with foot-tapping and other repetitive movement to convey anxiety. This body language communicated a shared understanding with the mentally ill, and facilitated her research.

Covert ethnographers, such as myself are "engaging in a more . . . conscious (but not all that different) 'making' of the body that already exists in everyday social life" (Parr 2001). Working on private property, where the management was unaware of my study, I used strategies to hide my research from the security at the site. My most conscious ways of doing this involved using small notepads that could fit in my pocket whenever security came by, and keeping my interviewing as much hidden from the security as possible. In order to do this, I was aware of the presence of the security at all times. Often this diverted my attention from the immediacy of the interviews or observation. It also gave me a heightened awareness of being on private property.

I also consciously constructed my ethnographic presence in order to put my informants at ease and facilitate my interviews. By wearing casual clothes and approaching people in a friendly manner, I tried to blend into the relaxed leisurely atmosphere of the park in order to participate in the environment I was studying. This friendly, relaxed stance also communicated an understanding towards the people I was interviewing, making it easier for them to speak freely with me.

1.6.3 Making George Famous

The research practice itself did not harm anyone that I came into contact with. I felt comfortable continuing without consent from the company because I did not feel that it would be harmful to the public or the company itself. There was no part of my research or

writing that I felt would violate anyone's privacy or otherwise harm anyone involved. I only used the actual names of people from whom I obtained permission to do so, and I did not reveal last names for anyone whom I interviewed. Some may argue that even with an informant's permission to use their name, the researcher is still responsible for protecting their privacy, and actual names simply should not be used. Since I am not using last names at all, and it would be very difficult to identify anyone in my study by visiting the site, I do not see any reason to change the names when I did obtain such permission.

My key informant, George, expressly asked me to use his name in my writing. George worked rotating shifts at a nearby restaurant, and often spent time between shifts at the park. He is the one person who was there most often on a regular basis, and spent the most time overall at this location. During my fieldwork, he quickly became my best source of information about this site. I realize that there may be situations in which it is dangerous, or a serious invasion of privacy to use in informants real name. I do not feel that this is one of those cases. I spent enough time (over the three months of my fieldwork) with George to know that he was very aware of what I was doing, and understood the implications of using his name in my work. He laughed as he asked me to "make him the hero," and I laughed at how he had phrased his question. We had already agreed that I would use his real name, now he explained that he just wanted more. He wanted to be a central part of my writing. In an essay on fieldwork with children, Stuart Aitken asks, "how do we make kids world-famous?" (Aitken 2001). The children that he worked with wanted him to use their real names. He answers this question by saying, "perhaps simply by listening and being part of their worlds for a while and, if asked for an opinion, but underscoring the importance of their personal geographies" (Aitken 2001). George wanted more than that, and I felt that I owed him more.

Aitken's work may hold a higher level of responsibility since he is working with children. Because of his understanding of my work, and of our work together, I feel that I can give him the representation that he chose.

In so many ways, George *is* a hero at this site. He was the most frequent regular visitor, and also someone who was there at different times of the day, both on weekdays and on weekends. This schedule, combined with his keen observation, gave him an extraordinary appreciation for the activities and people at this site. By using his real name, I feel that I am privileging the meaning of the relationship that I had with George at the time of my fieldwork. I also feel that I am giving him the representation that he is looking for, and in this way further highlighting his personal geography.

In this section I have described my field methods, which consisted of ethnographic observations and interviews over the summer of 2000. I also discussed some of the ethical implications of the choices in my research strategy. In particular, I address the reasoning for covert ethnography, primarily for purposes of access to the site. I also explain why I chose to go against the tradition of using aliases in ethnographic description in the case of my key informant. While this is not an approach that I necessarily advocate, in this case, I gave him the presence that he would have chosen in my writing, and the presence that allows me to recognize the importance of his personal geography at this site. This "lived space" (in Lefebvre's terms, 1991) for George, and the other groups who use the park, was originally envisioned very differently by the designers and architects. The next chapter turns to "conceived space" (Lefebvre 1991) to examine how that space is designed in its material form, as well as structured through security and surveillance.

CHAPTER 2: DESIGNING AND ENVISIONING THE MATERIAL SETTING

2.1 Location and Setting

This chapter begins with a brief description of the setting of the park within the Galleria area in Houston. Section 2.2 discusses the vision of the designers and architects who provide the material aspects of the setting, or the preliminary definition of the setting. The next section discusses the surveillance and the structuring of the space by the security personnel. The final section in this chapter examines the public reaction to the exclusivity of the space, and sets the stage for the routines that emerge in their use of the space in Chapter Three.

2.1.1 Houston¹

Houston was founded in 1836 by J.K. and A.C. Allen, and named after Sam Houston. It served as the capital of the Texas republic from 1837-1839. Houston grew from a small town on the Buffalo Bayou to a railroad center, and after the digging of a ship channel from 1912-1914 on Buffalo Bayou and Galveston Bay, the city was linked to the Gulf and became a deepwater port. Coastal oil made the city financially wealthy quickly and the chemical industry was able to exploit natural gas, sulfur, salt and limestone deposits in the area.

With the availability of air conditioning in the 1930s, downtown development expanded, and in the 1950s a large number of skyscrapers were constructed. NASA's mission

¹ This section draws extensively on information from Columbia Encyclopedia's online entry on "Houston." The Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia (1994, 2000).

control center opened a few miles from Houston in the early 1960s. High oil prices through the 1970s boosted Houston's economy. In the mid eighties, the price of oil plummeted, and downtown Houston was feared to become a ghost town. However, with the diversification of Houston's economy, and the boom in the U.S. in the 1990s, Houston has become the fourth largest city in the U.S., and a major center for finance and medicine.

Downtown Houston has a large number of skyscrapers that were built in the 1970s and 1980s during the oil boom. The historic market district, centered around market square still has many of these original modern-looking buildings. However, the majority of Houston's downtown skyline is now postmodern looking. Philip Johnson, one of the architects of the Transco Tower, who is cited as hailing the postmodern movement, also designed two very distinctive structures in downtown Houston, Pennzoil Place (711 Louisiana), two black towers with innovative shapes, and his NationsBankCenter (700 Louisiana), a striking three-tiered and gabled building.

2.1.2 Galleria

Williams Tower is located seven miles west of downtown in the Galleria area of Houston in Texas. The Galleria area is an upscale district, with shopping malls, restaurants, hotels and apartment complexes. The Williams Tower is located at the heart of the Galleria district, across the street from the Galleria Mall. The Galleria Mall is Houston's most upscale mall, it spans two city blocks, and includes stores such as Gucci and Fendi. The Williams Tower Park is set in a landscape of privilege, in an area that is now known as "uptown" Houston.



Figure 1. Aerial Photograph of Galleria Area in Houston, Texas.

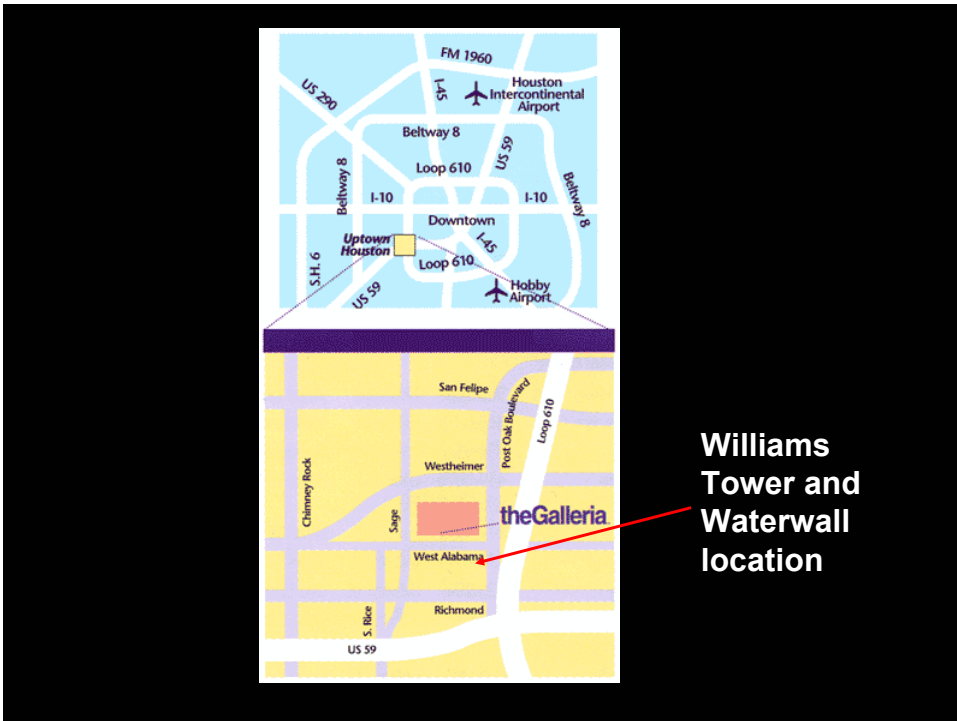


Figure 2. Location of Williams Tower and Waterwall relative to the Galleria Mall.

The landscaping in the Galleria area is unique to Houston. The streetscapes alone are worthy of attention. The medians are well designed and maintained, with trees, flowers and grass. The street furniture in this area is eye-catching, particularly to drivers (since it is so large that pedestrians would have to crane their necks to look at it.) There are huge curved metallic beams that run across pedestrian crossings from one side of the street to the other. In addition, there are large metallic rings (about 4 or 5 feet in diameter) with the name of the street on them, hanging above the intersections. The traffic lights are very distinctive in appearance, also shiny metallic silver to match the rings and curves. This gives the area a distinctive and modern look and it is immediately apparent that it is an upscale area. A visitor remarked that she thought the streets looked "space agey."

The Galleria area of Houston has developed considerably in the last 24 years, since the Transco Tower was first built. The lack of tall buildings in the area was one of the primary reasons that this location was chosen for the Transco Tower (this is discussed in the following section). It is still the tallest building in Houston, but it especially stands out in this area because there are few tall buildings around there. When it was first built this was even more applicable, since the area had not become as built up as is today.

2.1.3 Layout of Williams Tower Park and Waterfall

Figure 3 below shows a plan of one side of the site. Across the street from the complex, below Hidalgo street (which would be below Figure 3) there are another set of office buildings, with three lakes associated with them. The lakes are separated by two bridges and the third Lake has a small fountain. There are many ducks, geese, and turtles around and in the lakes. As illustrated in Figure 3, there is a lawn in front of the Tower. At the end of the lawn is a U-shaped waterfall with water falling on both sides. It is 62 feet

high, and can be seen from the nearby 610 Freeway. The garage, which is adjacent to the Tower, is connected by a skywalk to the Galleria Mall, which is to the north of the complex across the street from West Alabama Street. The aerial photo on the following page, Figure 4., shows the entire site.

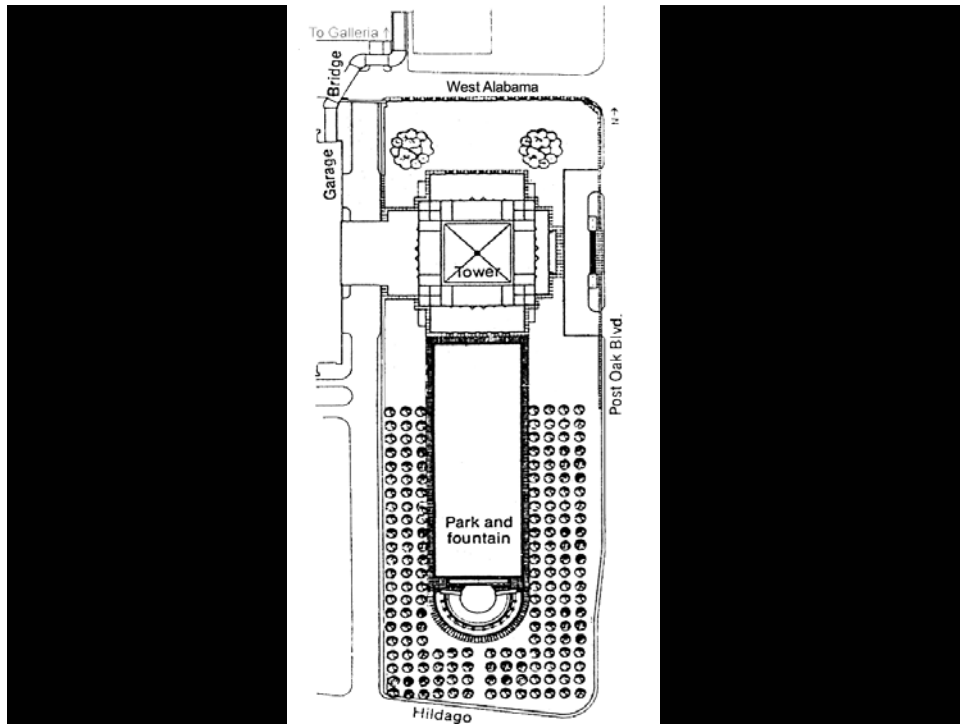


Figure 3. Plan of the Tower side of Williams Tower Park.

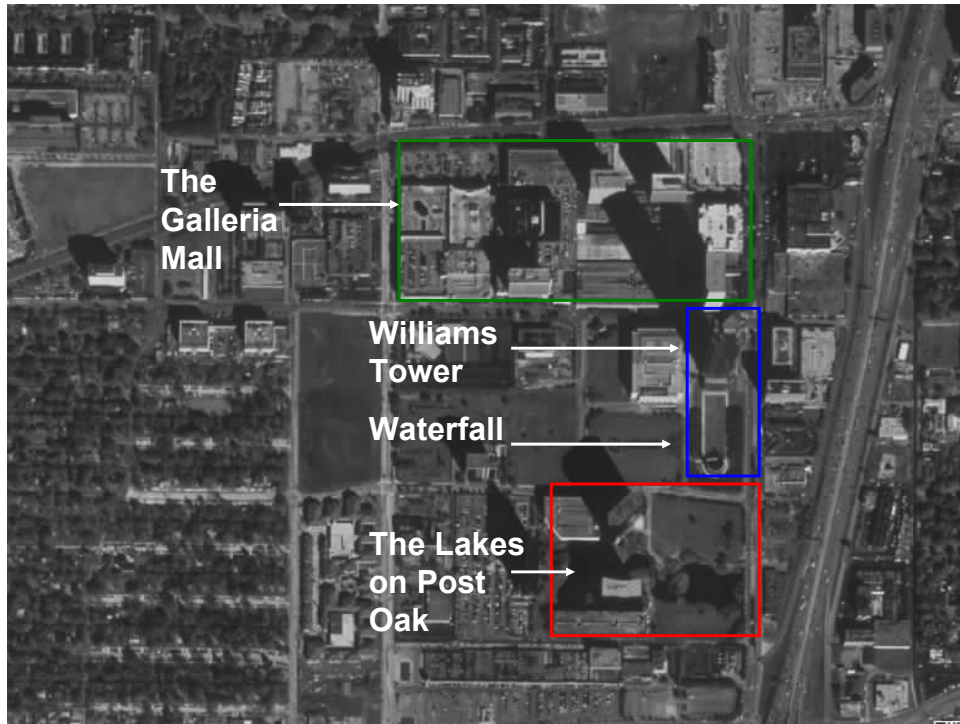


Figure 4. Aerial Photograph of Field Site.



Figure 5. View of Waterwall from 42nd floor of Williams Tower.

The above photograph, Figure 5., was taken from the 42nd floor of the Williams Tower. You can see the lakes in the background, and the fountain structure in the center. There is an arched wall in front of the fountain that is also visible in this picture. The street on the left shows the arched metallic structures and circular ring at the intersection and pedestrian crossing.

2.2 Structuring and Ordering of the Space

The space is structured through architectural forms, such as pathways, benches etc. as well as blockades that are set up around the area. The security determine which activities are acceptable, providing further structure. The receptiveness of the tower employees to the public, including tourists is another form of order. The lighting and the fountain being turned on and off signify times when the park is open or closed. Surveillance cameras allow security inside the tower to keep a watchful eye on activities outside, even when they are indoors. The streets provide the most structure, through accessibility, parking, stopping being permitted only in certain places at certain times. The presence or absence of Williams employees would also to a certain degree influence people who might chose to come to the area.

On weekdays, at least one security guard stands at the foreboding 3m-tall front entrance (shown below) every morning, often there are two. The back entrance also has a security guard standing outside in the mornings, usually until mid-morning, when Williams Tower employees have stopped arriving. Inside the building, until 5pm, stands a prominent security person at the front desk as you walk in. All day and all night, the entire area is patrolled every hour by uniformed security in golf carts. The carts say “Galleria security” on them in big blue letters, and if you walk across to the mall, you’ll notice the same uniformed security wearing Stetsons for easy identification.



Figure 6. The Entrance to the Tower

At 5pm, the security at the front desk is relieved by the night shift security, who will be there until 9am the next morning. The security may ask you to leave after 10pm, depending upon who is on duty that night. Even without the security's hourly rounds, there is an ever-present surveillance camera located above the garage, facing Hidalgo Street. In Figure 7 below, the camera is at the top right corner of the building in the foreground. The camera allows the security in the building to see clear to the parked cars on Hidalgo Street.



Figure 7. View of the Tower and Garage from Hidalgo Street.

The fountain is turned off at 10pm and on at 7am. In the morning, one hears the clumsy clanging of trashcans being emptied from the sidewalks at the lawn in front of the building. By 5pm, someone is polishing the shiny black stone at the base of the *scenae frons* in front of the fountain. Until 5.40pm, there is a steady stream of Hispanic women coming towards the building in blue uniforms having a quick meal or lounging on the lawn, relaxing before work. They provide janitorial services for the building. These women are on the night shift, and work from 5.45pm until 11.45pm.

A policeman directs the traffic on West Alabama Street between four and six, the rush hour peak. At six p.m., the internal roads are blocked on both sides of Hidalgo, closing off direct access to both the lakes and the tower. A security guard sets up orange pillar and chain blockades at each end of the internal road, and one central blockade in front of the

garage. At the lakes, blockades are set up at each end of the road as well as at the entrance of the garage.

2.3 Security

The security personnel at the site participate in a weeklong training in which they are sent up to Austin to be trained in carrying out their duties at the Williams tower park.

The security personnel enforce the rules that are set up by Hines corporation, in order to maintain public relations by keeping the park safe and under control. The security's interactions with the public are the locus of the flexibility of the rules, because they are the agents who are responsible for enforcing them. The human agency involved in enforcing the rules affords them flexibility that comes about as a result of their interaction with the public.

As stated by Giddens:

“ It is perfectly true that a corporation can be an agent in law. But laws have to be interpreted and applied; it takes human agents to do that, as well as to frame them in the first place” (Giddens 1984)

While the company has set up some rules, there is a flexibility in the application of these rules that comes about as a result of the social actions of the people using the space. As a result, the place is negotiated through these social practices rather than imposed through a logic that transcends any situation (deCerteau : 1984).

Kenny, the ex-security guard that I interviewed stated that it would be too difficult for the corporation to only open the park to employees and guests of the company, since that would mean that the security would have to ask every person on the property if they had a pass to the building. It appears that there are three main factors that allow for the flexibility of the rules: the interaction of the security with the public; the company's desire to maintain a friendly image with the public; and the difficulties involved in actually enforcing the rules.

2.4 Public Reaction to Exclusivity

As mentioned in the introduction, Hines Corporation, the property management, denies that the park was not fully open to the public. In my interview with Lee Barnard, the property manager, he said that the park was built “all for the public” all along. However, newspaper articles from the Texas Reading Room show evidence to the contrary. The park was not intended to be open to the public, and the company was surprised at the public reaction to the park when it first opened.

The park is described as being either entirely closed to the public, or the public was only permitted to be on the sidewalks:

“Transco park is a beautiful oasis of green containing one of the most architecturally striking fountains in Houston...However the park grounds are not open to the public and security guards patrol the premises, keeping people off the grass and preventing the curious from getting too close to the fountain” (Houston Digest: 1985)

The article also cites the public relations manager, Ms. Wirth, stating that the public should stay on the sidewalks:

“As to the private park being put into the public, Wirth said that people can come and go as they wish in Transco Park – as long as they stay on the sidewalks” (Houston Digest: 1985)

Since there is only a single strip of sidewalk around the front lawn, the public hardly seems welcome at the site, particularly considering that they were not permitted to get close to the fountain. Also, there are numerous reactions of the public citing their disappointment at the lack of parking space, the lack of the company’s interest in their community, and even disappointment at not being able to use the lawn to eat lunch sitting under the trees. (Houston Digest: 1985; Houston Chronicle 1986).

Despite the park being closed to the public initially, this eventually seems to have changed. The rules seem to have become more flexible with the continued use of the park by the public. The next chapter examines how the public use the park in order to re-define it as a public setting.

CHAPTER 3: ROUTINIZATION AND REGIONALIZATION -- THE CONSTRUCTION OF A PUBLIC PLACE

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter I discuss the routinization and regionalization of space. Regions (as discussed in section 1.2), are created through activities – fly fishing, walking dogs and they are a critical component of the process through which this private space becomes public.

3.2 George, the Hero of My Story

The majority of people whom I met at the site fit into the routines that I discuss below; however my key informant, George did not fit into any of these routines. He was there at different times throughout the day and week for two years before I met him. This made him keenly aware of the activities and people at the site. As time went along in my ethnographic fieldwork, I would compare my knowledge to his. We would discuss who was there when and why. As I told him about my project, and that I was writing a paper on it, he asked if he would be a part of it. " I want to be the hero in your story," he said.

George was different from the other people at my site simply because he was not there for any of the activities that characterized any of the regions. He worked nearby as a pastry cook, and because his shifts changed regularly, and he often worked double shifts, he needed a place to relax or sleep depending upon the time of day when he had a break.

There were no homeless or unkemptly dressed people who tried to sleep at this site during the time that I was conducting my fieldwork. Although I did see one man with disheveled hair and clothes, he was only there for short periods of time, never more than an hour or two, and he never tried to sleep on the benches. George had managed to make friends with the security. He knew all the security guards at the site. They would always say “hi” to

him, and usually there would have been an extended conversation. George would not lie down on the bench, he would simply close his eyes while sitting. The security did not bother him when he was sleeping.

George's ability to get around all the rules set up by the owners of this private space makes him a unique individual. Through his friendship with security guards, through his constant presence at this location, he was able to get around all the rules. Since he was there at different times, both on weekends and weekdays, and because of his keen sense of observation, his knowledge of the site was extraordinary. This knowledge, combined with his ability to get around so many of the rules set up by the property management does make him a hero of sorts.

3.3 Morning Routines

Weekday mornings were the quietest time at the site, with mostly Williams security employees guarding the doors of the office building. At least one, and often two security officers were at the front of the building, and they sign people in as they enter the building. There is one security officer at the back of the building, who checked in employees from that entrance. After about 10 o'clock they went back indoors. At this point, the majority of employees would have arrived at the tower.

There was a bus-stop at one end of the park, on Post Oak Boulevard, a few feet down the street from the tower, and another at the opposite end of the park, on Hidalgo Street. Every day people walked directly across the lawn and sidewalk, usually in a hurry, to catch the bus from Hidalgo. Few people felt the need to maintain the boundary between the public sidewalks and streets and the private lawn if they were going towards the bus stop. Also, for

the working people taking these two bus routes, walking through that private property became part of their routine.

Around mid-morning, a pair of smokers would often appear. Either they walked around, sat on the bench and smoked, or leaned against the side of the tower, looking at the waterfall. Lance was one of the building contractors hired to build the waterfall and he found it strange that he was later an employee at the Williams tower, looking out at the waterfall whenever he came out for a smoke. He told me about the other option, smoking on the eighth floor, in the garage where other employees congregate to smoke.

During the mornings, shadows covered most of the park and it was cool enough to enjoy better than any other time of the day, the park was always empty. Occasionally, there were employees from Williams working on the irrigation system or the landscaping. The irrigation system for the front lawn was very elaborate, and it took a great deal of maintenance to keep all the irrigation nozzels pointed in the right direction to so that when they are raised up in order to water the lawn, each of them are watering their particular section of the lawn without overlap, or spillage onto the concrete or the benches. George, my key informant, who had been going there regularly for years, told me that the young man who had asked us to excuse him while they turned on all the sprinklers (he was asking us to move away from that area in case we got wet during the testing) had only one task as part of his job, that was to correct the alignment of the sprinklers. He only did this once a month, according to George. So, George was remarking how well-off the corporation was to be able to hire a particular individual whose only job was to make sure the irrigation system was aligned to water the lawn.

3.4 Lunchtime

At lunchtime, the Williams Tower employees come out of the building, some of them sit and eat lunch on the benches, but this is not common. Lunchtime visitors are generally there between 11.30 am and 2 pm. Even on a busy day, there are no more than 30 or 40 people on the front lawn at any given time, since most people are not there for very long. Generally the benches are taken up first, but sometimes people will prefer to sit on the fountain steps, facing the tower. Often, people at the park during this time will bring a book and sit on the benches to read. The readers are generally there for the entire hour, but they stay longer than the other lunchtime visitors.

Perhaps because of this being the precious hour that people were off from work, I noticed that people were noticeably less friendly during their lunch hour than they were during the other times, when they were considerably more relaxed. I found that if they had been there for a longer time, they tended to be more open to questions. The fountain is very relaxing, and it is difficult to sit in the park for twenty or thirty minutes without beginning to feel at least somewhat more relaxed.

Surprisingly, I found that the majority of people eating lunch on the park grounds are not employees of the Williams Tower, but other buildings nearby. The employees seem to have the attitude that they have better places to relax than these people who come here. People working in the tower often expressed that there was a prestige associated with working there, Lance remarked that it was “kind of a status symbol.” However, this prestige did not carry over into eating alfresco lunches at the park. Perhaps this is related to Houston’s weather, since it is mostly not desirable to sit outside if one has access to air conditioning,

particularly during the summer. Many employees mentioned that they would eat lunch in the Galleria Mall, which is connected to the tower through an air conditioned skywalk.

Or, those employees that do come during the weekdays say that they would never be there on the weekend. Employees seem to feel that this park is either only useful to them during the week, when they are required to be at work, or that when they are at work, they would prefer not to be at the park during their lunch hour, which is the only time when they could chose to leave the property.

3.5 Couples and Families

Williams Tower Park is a popular location for families to spend time together, even if it is just a short visit to the fountain which may not even last for half an hour. Because the park is centrally located in Houston, families from various different areas come to this location to relax and enjoy the park and fountain. Families would begin to arrive after around 4 p.m. and remain until it begins to get dark. Often the visit included a stop at the duck pond across the street, especially earlier in the afternoons.

Couples seemed to wait until after dark before they began to arrive. These two groups shared most of the space, although the duck pond across the street was more populated with couples when it is dark. The area on the fountain side was better lit overall, because the lights from the tower kept that area well lit, and there were also lights at the walkways between the garage and the tower, as well as along the skywalk to the mall. The lights on the fountain were turned on at 7.30pm.

The property management kept a close eye on activities on both sides of the street, but particularly the front lawn. They were aware of the couples' desire for privacy, and one of the security guards confided that he didn't go to the duck ponds as often during the

evenings. Mr. Barnard, the property manager, mentioned during my interview with him that there were a couple of incidents where couples who were engaging in sexual activities were asked to leave.

Photographing at the waterwall is a very popular activity, despite security's attempts to prevent it in certain situations. "Professional" photography is only allowed with a permit that costs \$250 per occasion. While this seems to be enough to discourage the average amateur photographer, there are both amateurs and professionals who manage to get around this rule.

The professional photographers who are there regularly (mostly wedding photographers) know not to bring their tripods or "fancy looking equipment," since this is what the security guards are looking for in order to determine their "professionality." The other way is claiming that the photographer is a friend or relative – which usually works, unless there is a tripod involved. Without the permit, tripods are absolutely not allowed. An ex-security guard that I interviewed told me that someone once tripped over a tripod and tried to sue the company. That was the reason why tripods were not well received by the security.

The waterwall, as the fountain is called, was a popular backdrop for wedding and quinceañera photographs and home videos. People who were there for photos or videos were often in a rush, staying no longer than necessary for their photos. It was always on the date of the special occasion, so it was difficult to get more in-depth interviews with these groups. A man who was originally from Vietnam, and had grown up in Houston, was posing for a wedding shot with his bride at the center of the waterwall. While the photographer was taking pictures of the bride alone, as her mother fussed over the bride's hair and her veil, I talked to the groom:

“Why did you choose this place?” I asked him

“Because its pretty, and we wanted something that was Houston because we both grew up in Houston. That was the main thing.” He paused and added, “This is very Houston.”

Not only was the park a popular place for wedding photos, but several women with whom I spoke fondly recalled that their husbands had proposed to them at the park.

Quinceañera photography at the fountain is also popular. Usually, a group of teens comes out of a limousine parked on Hidalgo, and a parent with a camcorder will take photos or video tape while the young women pose in front of the fountain. A particularly energetic group of Latina women, dressed in beautiful satin dresses in various shades of pastels were more creative than other quinceañera groups, and they managed to climb up to the steps high up on the side of the fountain, carefully hiking their dresses up so that they did not get wet from the water on the steps. The women arranged themselves in groups of two or three to a stair, with the quinceañera woman on the highest level, and posed for several shots amidst the spray of the fountain. It was a beautiful sight, and the photographs were most likely quite memorable.

Many people are aware that the fountain is turned off at 10pm. This is generally dismissed with a statement such as “well, I won’t leave unless I’m told to leave.” Many families arrive between six and eight p.m. By nine, the majority of people at the waterwall are couples, not families. “Unless they are being offensive, I usually don’t bother them,” confided a security guard. “Even though they are supposed to leave at ten.” There is usually some dispersal at 10pm. The sound of the water stopping and the darkness becoming more pronounced as the lights on the fountain are turned off is usually a small event, with some

oohs and aaahhs from the crowd and some people getting up to leave. Often, though, it seems to have little impact, as the activity continues after the interruption.

The structure of the space, the turning on and off of the fountain, and the way that the area is managed with security guards provides only a partial and precarious structure.

Through the agency of the couples and families using the park, it is made into a frequented, public park, and a place of leisure. This results in the construction of what J.B. Jackson calls an “ad hoc public space,” one that has been transformed from commercial or corporate space into a public park.

Couples are there at night because they view it as “a romantic place.” The romance is in part created through the glamour of the grand waterfall cascading down, the lights, the greenery all around. However, without the presence of the couples, it would be the cold romance of grandeur. Through the embodiment of the space with couples, it becomes reinterpreted as a place to be *in* rather than a place to admire. The romance is as much created by the couples’ interpretation and engagement with the place as it is by the design of the space.

The lakes across the street are popular with families during the daytime, particularly on the weekends. In the evenings, and especially once it becomes dark, there are no families by the lakes. At night, the lakes are purely “couple territory” with no other groups invading the niche they have carved out for themselves. Even the security doesn’t drive over to that side. A security guard said, “there’s never anything but couples there...I concentrate on this side.” The consistent, collective action of the couples has in turn led to the appearance of horse-drawn carriages and roses-sellers, adding to the romance (see Chapter 4). Through the

consistency and regularity in the use of the space, specific regions are created for certain activities.

3.6 Fly Fishers

On Saturday mornings, between around eight and ten in the morning, a small group of men with fly fishing equipment began to arrive. They parked in the lot next to the second lake, and gather around the lake, until around eleven thirty or twelve, before the midday heat strikes. The owner of one of the angling supply stores gave informal workshops in fly fishing to people who come. The workshops began four years ago, but he said there were people fly fishing there before the workshops even started. He brought extra equipment and an assistant, but they usually just practiced their own casting.

Aaron, who learned how to fly-fish about a year ago has been coming to this location ever since, to practice casting about once a month. He explained that this place offered all he needed for a practice site -- accessibility, water, a field, even parking. Aaron said (personal communication: September 3, 2000) :

I need the wide open space behind me, because the lines take up a lot of room. The water grips the line, and causes a tension. You need to have both the water and the open space behind you. You can't practice in an open field. This is one of the few places in Houston that has all that. Its easy access, close to home, there are no fences around. You just park over there, walk over and it's a nice place to be, with the trees and the manicured lawn. Sometimes when I go near the bayou to practice, the line catches the steps. If I had less time, I'd go to the bayou.

I asked Aaron, "Do you think this is a public park?"

"I don't know if it's city property," he said. I waited for him to say a little more. He added, "I guess that its probably not, because its so nice. It would take a lot of money ...I think its private property."

“Does that make you feel uncomfortable about being here at all?” I asked.

“I’ve never felt uncomfortable,” he replied. “Maybe if I was alone...but there are no trespassing signs.”

“Would you still come here if you knew for certain that it was private property?”

“I would still do it because it’s a nice area. Until someone specifically came up to me and had proof that I can’t [be here] then I wouldn’t leave...Everyone knows about the waterwall and they all come here. I have a lot of friends who come here...even on the news they show people around the waterwall having a good time on the weekend. They didn’t show the fishing on television, though...I bet the original reason they made it was for a break from work for people who work there. But it doesn’t hurt them if people come on the weekends.”

It appears that Aaron had not considered whether or not the place was private or public until I brought up that question. This was not part of his criteria in determining if he wanted to go there. He went there because it fit his requirements for practicing fly fishing. As he points out, there were no signs, and no fence. These would have been obvious indicators to him that it was private property where he was not welcome. The presence of other people appears to be a key factor in making him feel comfortable about being there, far more so than the private or public nature of the property.

The regulars at the site, the fly fishing workshop, served to provide a space for Aaron to feel comfortable at that location. Through the collective establishment of a routine in a particular portion of the property, the fly fishers created a time and place where they are expected to be. The dog owners, who chose the lake closest to the street were aware of the fishers’ lake, and kept away from that lake even when the fly fishers were not around to endanger the dogs with hooks and lines.

Through the establishment of a spatialized routine, fly fishers and dog owners find and create regions for these activities within the space of the park. Dogs were strictly

prohibited from the perfectly manicured lawn in front of the tower. As a result, dog owners have shifted their activities across the street at the lakes. There were frequently people walking dogs or just letting their dogs loose around the lake.

Fly fishers used only the lake further from the street, just on Saturday mornings, from 10am until 11 or so. They were practicing the art of fly-casting, without hooks, although there are fish in the water. The dog owners, who appropriated the lake closest to the street are very aware of the fishers' activities. Nonetheless, the dog owners were cautious about sticking to "their" lake even before the mid-morning arrival of the fly fishers, and well after they leave. During the week, when the fishers were not around, the dog owners still tend not to venture past that one lake.

The regionality of the space is as much created by the engagement with the equipment as it is with the presence of the equipment itself. The lakes are not different from each other until we examine the activities that are conducted there. These activities in turn will determine other activities. For instance people will notice that there are fly fishers around, and be careful not to bring dogs or children nearby.

3.7 Dog Owners

Dog owners are regular in their presence at the park. There was a core group that was only there on the weekends. This group provided a unique community for dog owners. Trainers and other dog owners were also there on the weekends, and sometimes there were a few non-regulars in the evenings. There was no off-leash dog park in Houston, so this park filled that need. Dog owners that I talked to stressed the importance of interaction for dogs with each other and the public. This location had been made to serve several particular functions for both dog owners and their pets.

3.7.1 Dog Owner Community

There were about six or seven dog owners who felt a sense of community at this end of the park. They would return regularly every week, for about two hours on Saturday and Sunday. A woman in her late twenties said, “This is a nice socializing place. It is better than going to a bar and drinking.” When I asked her why, she said “It's outdoors, there's water, I look forward to coming here on the weekends. There is no other place like this in Houston.” Another woman also in her late twenties said she had gotten to know people who were there on the weekend for about two hours each time.

The majority of dog owners that I talked to recognized the presence of this core group, but did not necessarily view themselves as part of this group. They emphasized that they were only there because of their dogs. A man in his thirties, sitting on the lawn chair he had brought, said, “I come here every Saturday and Sunday. I try to hang with the regulars. But I don't come here to socialize. There is a popular group that is cool over there.” Some people would just occasionally come to the park with their dogs, but there was also a group that was regularly there. The regular group knew each other well, their dogs were also acquainted with each other. This group had set up a web page to try to call attention to the lack of a dog park in Houston, and they were creating a forum for discussion for people with dogs in Houston.

3.7.2 "People Act As If This Is a Dog Park-- We've Made It One."

The presence of dog owners with their dogs is inviting to other dog owners not only because of the sense of community that it provides, but also because it then appears to be a public dog park. A few of the people I interviewed were under the impression that it was

public property, owned by the city. The majority however, were aware that although this place was *used* by the public, it was private, corporate property.

The fact that this property was privately owned worked to both for and against the dog owners. With a public dog park there would be rules that would make the park more user-friendly to both the dog owners and dogs. However, Elsie, a German woman in her thirties, who had lived in the U.S. for 14 years, noted that "if it is private property, then the police cannot say or do anything unless there are problems." Gerald Hines Interests' management of the property also makes the dog owners feel as though they are not unwelcome. "I heard once it was sold with a clause that nothing is supposed to be built here. People can use it. I think it's private. The owner doesn't have a problem with people enjoying themselves," said Elsie. Jamie, a woman in her late 20s, said "I heard that the owners don't care. The owners seem nice. They're probably dog owners and see the need for this." This personalization of the corporate ownership made Jamie feel welcome at the park.

Alison, another regular at the park said that there was "an unwritten law" at the park, so a lot of people let their dogs off the leash. This would sometimes cause problems when dogs became aggressive with one another, but, as Jamie added, "dogs that are offleash are more friendly. They get defensive when they are on a leash." Referring to the leash law, she said, "they let it slip." She remembered that a couple of months back,

"a 7yr. old girl had been killed by rotweilers, and the next day, they came out and gave 40 tickets. Every other city has a park for dogs. They let it slide because this is the only city that doesn't have one. People acted as if this is a dog park – we've made it one."

This keen observation by Jamie sums up this section. The lake area is open to dogs because people with dogs have made it a dog park, with a community for the dog owners, as well as a place for dogs to socialize with other dogs, and roam without a leash.

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter has shown how the activities of the public, through the engagement with material culture and with other people, have led to the construction of the place as public. This construction has occurred through the regionalization of space, or the creation of regions where certain activities are conducted, as well as the creation of time-space routines for each activity. Employees who came out of the building to smoke were always there at mid-morning, in the area closest to the building, where they either sat on the benches or leaned against the tower. Families stayed on the better-lit side of the tower in the early evenings, whereas couples were mostly on the side of the lakes after dark. Fly fishers were only at the second lake on Saturday mornings, whereas dog owners, also on weekend mornings, were only at the lake closest to the street. This chapter has shown how each of the groups went to the park for different purposes, and used it in different ways, creating a diverse public space. The large numbers of people at the park has drawn several vendors, such as rose-peddlers and ice-cream sellers. The following chapter illustrates how the image of the place as public that is constructed through the activities discussed above returns to re-define the setting as a landscape of leisure and tourism, despite its original conception as corporate office space.

CHAPTER 4: LANDSCAPE OF LEISURE AND TOURISM WITHIN CORPORATE SPACE

4.1 Introduction

When the park was first opened, there were no vendors at the site. This was not part of the vision of the designers or architects. The public was not only unexpected, but to some degree unwelcome (Houston Digest 1985). In much the same manner that the public has appropriated the space, the vendors have done the same for their own commercial gain. As a result of the popularity of Williams Tower Park, today there are ice-cream vendors, rose sellers, light sticks and carriage rides available on site.

In my interviews with these vendors, I found that those who intended to conduct sales on the property managed to acquire permission to do so at no cost. None of them pay any sort of dues to the property owners or managers, and they use this private space without any concessions, aside from the permit (which was free of charge, also). On any other private property, and even on some public land, the same vendors would have had to pay some form of rent for their ice-cream stand or at least for the sales permit.

In my interview with Lee Barnard, one of the property managers, he gave the impression that the sale of items at the park were services provided by the company. Speaking of the carriage rides, he said that the company's founder had intended these to be there. However, considering the lack of restroom facilities and paucity of parking space, it is difficult to imagine that the company is service oriented in this way.

The ingenuity and creativity of the vendors at the park leads to a dramatic transformation in the landscape. The leisure activities are such a strong contrast to "office space" that they provide both an environment of relaxation for people in the city, and an

environment of tourism for visitors to Houston. The sale of ice cream and drinks, the carriage rides and roses and light-sticks makes the park into a warm, romantic and more inviting setting. All these items are luxury goods associated with leisure activities, and they indicate that this location is inviting that sort of activity, which would mean that the public are welcome at the site.

4.2 Carriage Rides

Sam and Lavenia Parker were involved in the carriage business since 1989. Gerald Hines, the developer of the property, had come by their business in Galveston in 1995. I interviewed Lavenia by telephone on February 15, 2001. Gerald Hines had personally asked them to come to the Galleria area, around his property. He gave them a “perpetual contract” to give rides and tours of the area.

Lavenia said:

He wanted to bring something exciting to the area...like San Anton', where you go around the Alamo. He liked them [carriage rides] in Galveston and San Anton'. He wanted something romantic, so it's only done at night, not during the daytime. But he was just that kinda guy. He was always interested in bringing activities to the Houston area people.

The addition of carriage rides has had some unanticipated reactions. Couples from Roxie club nearby began coming to the park after the club closed down.

4.3 Light Stick Vendors

Bill, one of the light stick sellers, says he has been selling light sticks at the park for four years. I didn't see him at all, until almost mid-July (over a month since I had begun my fieldwork), and even then, he was not a regular at the park. An entire month had gone by before he and his friend appeared, selling the light sticks at the park in the evenings. “There

are less people here when we get to March,” he told me, and “more people in the summer.” It was difficult to talk to him at all, since whenever he was around, he was busy selling the light sticks. At \$2 each, these were very popular, and even after he was only there for an hour, the entire front lawn would be lit up. Children would carry the sticks and running around, wear them as headbands, necklaces, or halos, and toss them around as Frisbees, and the green and purple neon would light up the park.

“There are a vast number of people that don’t know this is private property,” he said, “Those that know don’t care, its just real popular.” Bill described the fountain as “very awesome, almost religious” because of the indestructible elements of earth, fire and water in the architecture of the fountain. He was quick to point out that he was “like a social scientist,” in that he liked to observe people, and he didn’t sell the light sticks for the money. “I only sell maybe fifty of these a day. It mellows me out.” Considering that he was only there for about an hour or so each time I saw him, I found it difficult to believe that he was mostly there to watch people, and I figured that even selling 50 would leave him with 100 dollars for an hour’s work. I wondered if he had another job, or this was his only livelihood, but he was reluctant to discuss that with me.

Nonetheless, it seemed that his entrepreneurship had entirely transformed the park. Whereas most other nights, the lights only come from the tower and the waterfall, the park is beautifully lit when Bill is selling light sticks.

4.4 Ice-Cream Sellers

During the weekends, there is stiff competition in the sale of ice-cream at the park. The ice-cream vendors have often fought over the precious parking spot that is directly at the side entrance to the park on Hidalgo Street. This is the prime location for the sale of ice-

cream, since it is closest to the fountain and the lakes across the street, and is most visible from both sides of the street. George mentioned that he noticed the police come in to break up a fight between two ice-cream vendors (personal communication: Date). This was also confirmed in a later interview with Lee Barnard (personal communication). Mr. Barnard felt that it was a difficult for the company to have to put up with the ice-cream vendors because of the competition between them. The ice-cream vendors generally do not approach customers, they remain inside their vans on the street. This means that they are not on the private land, and are really not accountable to the property management in any way.

During the first month of my fieldwork, a Nigerian man would try to sell me ice-cream. He would often stand out in the shade of the trees and call out “Nice, cold ice-cream!! Don’t you want some ice-cream?” in his deep reverberating voice with a distinctive Nigerian accent to people further inside the park. He was the only ice-cream seller who did this, and his strong desire to get out and sell was clearly because this was his own business. Although I had observed him, I did not interview him because I felt uncomfortable with him. He repeatedly asked me if the man who came to pick me up everyday was my boyfriend or my husband, and I often felt as though he was just harassing me. I later found out from George that he had returned to Nigeria to his wife and children (personal communication).

All the other ice-cream sellers worked for someone, often with a commission, but none of them directly approached customers the way that the Nigerian man did. A woman from Peru, Maria told me:

Peru es un país de economía muy baja. Aquí hay trabajo. No es fácil de venir por acá porque es difícil conseguir buen trabajo porque no hablo el idioma. No puedo limpieza de casas o cuidar niños porque no hablo el idioma.

Peru's economy is poor. Here there are jobs. It is difficult to come here because it is hard to find a good job because I don't speak the language. I can't clean houses or baby-sit because I do not speak the language.

In her job selling ice-cream, her Spanish-speaking and her Hispanic face worked to her advantage, and attracted Hispanic customers to her window. Maria would always exchange pleasantries with her Hispanic customers in Spanish. I had not noticed until George pointed out to me that most of the Hispanic customers would go to Maria, or one of the other Hispanic vendors, whereas the African Americans would go to the Nigerian to buy their ice-cream.

Maria showed me how she arranged everything in her van. There were three refrigerators and a cooler inside the van, and as she let me in, I noticed how hot it was inside. Since it was summer, she would have to keep running the engine occasionally to keep things under refrigeration. All of the ice-cream was arranged in order, she explained, so that she could get it out quickly for her customers. She also sold sodas and water. When she had a steady stream of customers, she would have to stay inside, but she would often get out of the heat of the van, to stand in the shade offered by the trees on the sidewalk. She wrote down each of the items she sold, and also wrote down when she sold items to the rose vendors at a reduced price. She didn't like to this, she said, because they were having financial troubles, and wouldn't repay her boss for a long time.

Maria was mostly there to cater to the families rather than the couples. She left the park earlier than the rose vendors or the carriage ride vendors, because her customers declined as the evening went on. "*Quien les compro a las uno o dos en la madrugada?*" *Who buys these [ice creams] at one or two in the early morning?* she asked, But boyfriends buy roses and carriage rides for their girlfriends at these hours, especially on the weekends.

4.5 Rose Sellers

When I first began doing fieldwork at night, the presence of Gilda, Rosa and Steve was important to my feeling of safety. They were there every night, regularly selling roses and Polaroid shots with a backdrop of the waterwall. There were at least two of them that were always in the area, regardless of how empty the park became. Although the security guards were always watching from inside the building, they only came out once every hour. When it became dark, and particularly when the park was not very full, it was far more reassuring to see Gilda, Rosa and Steve than to think that the security would be there in an hour.

At first, Steve was skeptical about talking to me at all. He had seen me walk around during the evenings and nights and stop and take notes under the lamps. I had told him about my project from the outset. “Are you going to college to become a lawyer or a psychiatrist?” he asked, not understanding why I would want to study a park, or what anthropology is. It took a long time before I could talk to him about why he began selling roses there, because I had wanted him to feel that I was trustworthy enough for him to talk to me openly. When I did bring it up, he was pleased to be interviewed, and he said “I saw all the lovers who came to this park, and I thought they would want to have something to remember the park and the day by.” (personal communication August 8th, 2000). He talked to the people in the Williams Tower, the security were friends of his and “..one thing led to another...” I inquired about any fees he might have to pay the property managers and he said there was no fee. “ He know [sic] I’m trying to make an honest living and I’m sure he doesn’t need it.” (personal communication August 8th, 2000). Steve had managed used his friendship with the security to

establish himself at the park. He has been there for eight years. None of the other rose vendors are permitted on the property by the security.

Steve told me that his entire family, Hungarian and part Greek, although he quickly added “all born and raised in Houston,” were involved in the sale of roses. The roses were grown in a greenhouse on his aunt’s property. This was something that he was especially proud of, since they were fresh and homegrown rather than from a florist. He also said that sometimes his entire family would be there selling roses. Sometimes his father would be there, but not very often. Usually Steve and his sister Gilda would sit at opposite ends of the entrance on Hidalgo with two bucketfuls of roses, one red and the other of various colors. Steve’s sister-in-law, Rosa, would go around the park with a bunch of roses in her arms and a Polaroid camera. She would ask around if couples wanted to buy them, or get Polaroid shots of themselves in front of the fountain. Rosa’s son who was around seven or eight was always with her, but she let him wander around the park on his own, or play with other children while she sold flowers, and occasionally called out his name to check on him.

On one occasion, another group of three women with bunches of roses in their arms came to the park from the Galleria side, so Steve and Gilda hadn’t seen them come in. They tried to sell their roses to people. The security guard on duty had not noticed them, or if he had, he did not ask them to leave. In any case, Rosa had noticed them, and eventually came by and told Steve what was going on. They were speaking in Hungarian, but since they threw in bits of English I understood that Rosa had asked the other women to leave, and she was very upset that they had been trying to sell at the park. Gilda and Steve had mentioned to me several times that they were the only rose sellers that were permitted to sell on this property, and they repeated that to these women over and over again.

It was a very heated confrontation, with Steve doing most of the talking, Gilda chiming in and the women feeling embarrassed, and sometimes agreeing, sometimes appearing to be pleading with them to let them stay. I was sitting right next to the two buckets of roses, after my interview with Steve, listening carefully, but feeling as if I really shouldn't be there because the situation was so uncomfortable. I wondered if I had distracted Gilda by talking to her, perhaps she might have noticed otherwise. I tried to keep myself occupied by listening for the English parts so that I could understand more of what was happening.

Steve was giving them directions to where to go for the night, but I couldn't make out where, since it wasn't in English. "Tell them Steve sent you," he added. After he told them about the other location, he said, "Where else are you gonna go? The only other place is clubs, and you never know --when a guy's drunk he'll put out a gun. Its not worth it." This place was considered to be safe by Steve, and that was one of the other reasons why he was there, because he told me that he could make more money at a club.

For the flower sellers, this was considered to be Steve's place. The women repeated several times, "I know this is your place. I respect your place." Although it was obvious that she had not respected his place enough (especially by the look on Gilda's face each time they said that). By using his influence with his security friends, Steve had obtained an exclusive contract. In addition, by being at the Williams Park day after day, Steve, Gilda and Rosa had made it into *their* place. After the three women left, Steve said "at least we could help someone tonight," (by finding them another location where they could sell their roses), but Gilda was not convinced. She was still upset that these women had even tried to sell roses at *their* place.

4.6 Conclusion

All the vendors at this location established themselves on private property and through their daily practices, they made this property their own. Although the ice-cream sellers did not have a permit, by being there on a regular basis they changed the parking laws at the location. The light stick vendors dramatically altered the nighttime appearance of the site with little fluorescent lights everywhere. Carriage rides, ice-cream, roses and Polaroids all make the environment a festive place where leisure activities are encouraged. The presence of the vendors in turn draws more people to the site to relax, particularly in the evenings, since it is viewed more as a relaxing atmosphere, one of leisure and tourism, rather than as an office space.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

5.1 How Private Space Becomes a Public Place

In this thesis, I have demonstrated how private, corporate space at the Williams Tower Park has become a public place through its use. I began my analysis with Martin Heidegger's notion of *world* that shows how humans and the world that they inhabit are mutually constitutive. Given this premise, I argue that the people who use the park (those who inhabit it, rather than those who designed it) constitute the park as a public place. This is brought about in two ways: 1) *regionalization* of space – the division of the park into different regions where certain activities are conducted; 2) *routinization* of activities – the same activities are carried out in certain regions at certain times repeatedly, creating a time-space routine.

Because of the involvement of humans in the world, and the interdependence of humans and the world they live in, it is difficult to tease apart all the elements that go into the regionalization and routinization of activities in order to construct a public place. In order to do this, I followed Dr. Miles Richardson's three analytical steps in the construction of place through the incorporation of material culture into a situation: 1) the preliminary definition supplied by the material culture of a setting. In this case, that would be the architecture and design components such as shaded areas, lakes, walkways, benches, etc. 2) the interaction occurring within that setting -- both interactions between people and how people engage with the material culture. 3) the image that emerges out of the interaction and completes the definition by restating that situation's sense of place. Thus, the image that emerges from the interactions of people with each other and the material culture return to re-define the setting, in this case, as a public, rather than private setting. As a consequence, people using the space

have defined it as much as the structure of the space would define the activities within it. Sections 5.2 through 5.4 follow the above steps in order to illustrate more directly how this applies to the findings of my ethnographic fieldwork at Williams Tower Park.

5.2 Structuring of the Space

The preliminary definition supplied by the setting (in Richardson's terms) at the Williams Tower Park includes all the designed elements of the site and corresponds to the vision of the developers and architects as well as the property management. Here, I included not only the material culture of the setting, or the physical elements of the property, such as benches and lakes and the waterfall, but also the manner in which it is structured through security and surveillance of the space, since that is part of the preliminary definition supplied by the designers.

The area is patrolled hourly by a security guard in a golf cart, the fountain is turned on and off at fixed times, people are asked to leave when the park is closed. There is also a surveillance camera above the garage of the Tower. The space is structured as a landscape of defense – although there are no fences, gates, or walls, there are measures that are taken by the management in order to control not only who enters the space, but also what activities can be conducted on this property. Certain rules have been set up by the property management, for instance, the following are not permitted on the property: photography, use of tripods, dogs, sexual activities, standing in or leaning over the fountain. Within the structure that was set up by the management, the public has been able to manipulate the flexibility in the application of these rules. This manipulation, which comes about through the regularity in the use of different regions of the space in different ways, has led to the creation of a public place. A place that is used by the public, and imbued with a significance

that is distinct from what the designers and developers had envisioned. The following section investigates the second step in the process of the creation of the place, the interactions that come about through the use of the space, which ultimately lead to the construction of a public place.

5.3 Interactions – With Material Culture, Other People, and Security Personnel

People at the Williams Tower park fell into several groups: couples, families, fly fishers, dog owners, employees, security guards, vendors. Leaving aside those employed by the Williams or Hines corporation (security guards and employees), the public, that is the vendors, couples and other groups, were all regularly found in certain parts or regions of the park at certain times. First, I briefly review what regionalization and routinization are, then I describe some of the regions and routines I found at my site.

According to Heidegger, the way that humans inhabit the world creates a *regionalization* of space: the division of space into regions based on the activities that are conducted there, this could be thought of in the same way as how a home is divided into various rooms that correspond to activities -- kitchen, living room, bedrooms, study. I found regions at the Williams Tower that corresponded to each of the groups at the site. Furthermore, there were specific times of the day and days of the week when activities were conducted. This is what I call the *routinization* of activities.

In the mornings, employees would come out of the Williams Tower to smoke, either standing in front of the tower, or sitting at the benches closest to the tower. For the most part, however, the park is empty on weekday mornings. During lunchtime, the majority of people at the site were those who worked in nearby buildings, and they preferred to sit around the

fountain and front lawn rather than at the lakes. The park is more of an attraction to families during the late afternoon and early evening. At night, there are mostly couples, particularly after dark, and mostly at the lakes across the street from the tower. During the weekends, dog owners and fly fishers are found at the lakes, with specific lakes devoted to each group. Thus, distinct regions and routines are created for each group of users, which set up particular spaces as their place.

5.4 Emergent Realities – From Private Space Into Public Place

Users at Williams Tower Park construct the place as a public place of leisure. This contrasts with the vision of the designers, who built it as a purely corporate space. The large numbers of people at the park has led to the appearance of vendors at the site. What has emerged over time, is that rather than being purely corporate, office space, as envisioned by the designers, the place has become a public place that is a landscape of leisure and tourism within the corporate setting. The image of the place that was constructed by the public has returned to re-define it as a public place.

5.5 Implications of Research

My fieldwork has demonstrated that through the actions of the users at the Williams Tower, a site that was initially conceived as private became public through the regionalization of space and routinization of activities. This research implies that a strict division between corporate and public space is not necessarily useful in landscape studies. Furthermore, it implies that the agency of the public is not necessarily always constrained by the structure of the corporations that design spaces as private. Finally, despite what may appear to be a homogenization of space in an increasingly globalized world, a detailed

analysis of urban landscapes, and further ethnographies of place will lead to a deeper understanding of the construction of place.

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