

Lost space defined

What exactly is lost space and how does it differ from positive urban space, or 'found' space? Lost space is the leftover unstructured landscape at the base of high-rise towers or the unused sunken plaza away from the flow of pedestrian activity in the city. Lost spaces are the surface parking lots that ring the urban core of almost all American cities and sever the connection between the commercial center and residential areas. They are the no-man's-lands along the edges of freeways that nobody cares about maintaining, much less using. Lost spaces are also the abandoned waterfronts, train yards, vacated military sites, and industrial complexes that have moved out to the suburbs for easier access and perhaps lower taxes. They are the vacant blight-clearance sites—remnants of the urban-renewal days—that were, for a multitude of reasons, never redeveloped. They are the residual areas between districts and loosely composed commercial strips that emerge without anyone realizing it. Lost spaces are deteriorated parks and marginal public-housing projects that have to be rebuilt because they do not serve their intended purpose. Generally speaking, lost spaces are the undesirable urban areas that are in need of redesign—antispace, making no positive contribution to the surroundings or users. They are ill-defined, without measurable boundaries, and fail to connect elements in a coherent way. On the other hand, they offer

tremendous opportunities to the designer for urban redevelopment and creative infill and for rediscovering the many hidden resources in our cities.

The causes

There are five major factors that have contributed to lost space in our cities: (1) an increased dependence on the automobile; (2) the attitude of architects of the Modern Movement toward open space; (3) zoning and land-use policies of the urban-renewal period that divided the city; (4) an unwillingness on the part of contemporary institutions—public and private—to assume responsibility for the public urban environment; and (5) an abandonment of industrial, military, or transportation sites in the inner core of the city.

The automobile

Of all these factors, dependence on the automobile is the most difficult to deal with, since it is so deeply ingrained in the American way of life. It has resulted in an urban environment in which highways, thoroughfares, and parking lots are the predominant types of open space.

Mobility and communication have increasingly dominated public space, which has consequently lost much of its cultural meaning and human purpose. A staggering percentage of urban land in major



FIGURE 7.1
Washington, D.C.
Aerial Photograph.
Valuable urban lands
are often given over
to the excessive
movement and
storage of
automobiles.
(Courtesy: Marvin I.
Adleman)