

Second City: Chicago's Accessory Urbanism

Just before midnight on March 30, 2003 Chicago mayor, Richard M. Daley, ordered a police escort to guide a group of bulldozers onto Meigs Field, a single strip airport located directly adjacent to the Central Business District on a peninsula in Lake Michigan called Northerly Island. Here, in just a few short hours, they dug a series of X shaped ditches into the runway and vanished before the sun came up, closing the airport permanently. There was no advance warning and, outside of the police escort and construction crews, not a single witness. It is one of the most audacious and effective examples of top down urbanism in Chicago's history. Daley's plan was to turn the man made peninsula into a park, a goal he had held for over a decade and the original intention of the master plan designed by Daniel Burnham from which the land was shaped. Daley's excuse to act without caution or consequence in carrying out his vision: national security.¹

While this action is shocking for its direct and unapologetic methods it is not the first example of authoritarian urbanism in Chicago. The city has developed, primarily, through a series of top down processes. Daley's father, Richard J. Daley, used his mayoral position, some 30 years before his son's, to create radical and destructive acts of urban renewal, typified by the leveling of Block 37 - a prime and centrally located block in the heart of the city. Over time, the block and its redevelopment struggles came to physically embody the decline of Midwestern cities and the occasional tampering that accelerated this process.² The site sat vacant and awaiting renewal for over 40 years only to be recently developed with a compromised and, given its decades long build up, underwhelming project. Before the Daley family's brash operations, there was Daniel Burnham's 1909 Plan of Chicago in which he described his grand vision for "Paris on the Prairie" through a series of plans and alluring watercolor renderings by Jules Guerin.³ Burnham's vision likely had the single greatest impact on the development of the city and is symbolic of the attributes and attitudes that have come to define Chicago.

Despite the history of grand visions and decisions, there is a different and intriguing type of urbanism operating in the city, one that remains mostly hidden and is the perfect embodiment of the realpolitik. It is pragmatic to its core, introverted,

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and created through a series of practical considerations; it is the Chicago Pedway System. The Pedway is set in direct opposition to the ideology of the master plan and top down urbanism, it lacks the grand gesture and as such it contradicts Burnham's famed intentions to "Make no little plans." The Pedway is, in fact, only little plans. Built segment by segment through public and private development over the last 60 years, the Pedway has no master plan, yet it offers a unique and fantastic urban typology for the city.

The Pedway's first section was completed in 1951 creating underground connections between the red and blue transit lines, two light rail networks whose subway was constructed with Works Progress Administration funding provided by Franklin D Roosevelt's New Deal. On the surface the Pedway seems familiar, it is an (somewhat) interconnected network of underground tunnels and overhead bridges that extend, in total, 5 miles and connect more than 40 blocks in Chicago's Central Business District.⁴ This makes the Pedway nearly 3 times as long as the city's iconic loop rail system. It is not unlike many well-known systems in cities such as Minneapolis, New York, Tokyo, or Hong Kong. Like it's cousins the Pedway has been branded as a weather controlled and expedient circulation system uninterrupted by traffic, a way to move throughout the city in the comfort and safety of an interior environment. What sets the Pedway apart, however, is that given this primary function it is, at best, a complete failure. The reasons for this are numerous yet unimportant, its failure is merely a result of being mislabeled. The Pedway is not circulation, it is something else entirely, it is excess and accessory, and as a form of supplemental urbanism it offers more than it ever could as circulation. Not robust enough to stand on its own, the Pedway needs something to lean on. It acts as an attachment to more typical forms of urbanism and is dependent on the grid and the tower for its livelihood all the while offering each a vessel to project those attributes that don't fit neatly into their confines.

As Koolhaas observes in the opening paragraphs of *Exodus: Voluntary Prisoners of Architecture*, the Berlin Wall was cobbled together in a non-homogeneous manner to restrict access from the bad city to the good city.⁵ The Pedway shares similar traits of construction, yet where the Berlin Wall has strong form (a wall) and clear purpose (to separate), the Pedway has weak form and marginal purpose. It is in many ways the public/private inversion of the top down creation of the Berlin Wall. Who then are the voluntary prisoners of the Pedway? They are the exuberant inhabitants of the interior. They are those who celebrate the triumphs of a contemporary form of urbanism and all of its delights. Every morning they exit the comfort of their homes and walk into their attached garages. They sit in their climate controlled cars, drive to the city, and park in the underground lots that prop up the parks above. Upon exiting their car they walk, unknowingly, through the Pedway, stop at cafés for coffee, and enter the lobbies of their various workplaces. They take elevators to their company's floor, pass through reception, and take a seat in their cubicles. Midday, they head back down to the Pedway to select from a seemingly infinite amount of culinary choices, the preference tending toward those places that offer a view to the city streets beyond. Then at the end of the day they repeat the entire process in reverse, stopping briefly at retail shops and dry cleaners before heading home to begin again the next day.

Taking a deeper look at the Pedway as a new type of accessory interior urbanism it is best to understand it in competition and cooperation with three iconic attributes of the city: it's grid, it's layers, and it's program.



1

GRID

The Chicago grid is Jeffersonian in origin; a relentless march of 1 mile by 1 mile squares imposing a robust and consistent ideology onto the city. Buildings nest neatly into the sub grids forming a perfect harmony between figure and field.⁶ In the city's architecture, the grid has always existed as an organizational device to accept or challenge. It is replicated and extended in the work of Mies Van Der Rohe and undermined in the projects of Bertrand Goldberg. Yet all buildings ultimately fall subject to the grid's quartering no matter what their shape or articulation. It is hierarchically superior to all other urban forms. The Pedway, as accessory to the grid and its buildings, acts out in rebellion. It is allowed to do those things the grid cannot, subverting its authority, and as all accessories do, drawing attention to those parts of the field and its figures that deserve added emphasis. The grid is very clearly a field and its buildings are objects yet, despite its supplementary connection to both, the Pedway is neither. Mediating the difference between the extension of one system and the finite confines of the other, the Pedway is resolved as a vector without direction.

While the grid is consistent in its deployment and produces a regular "beat", it does experience moments of interruption. Mario Gandelsonas studies in detail in *The Urban Text*⁷ and further elaborates in *X-Urbanism*,⁸ the "accidents" created within the grid when it comes into contact with natural features like the river, infrastructural systems like freight trains or regional transit, and even diagonal streets – the grid's unlikely yet necessary partner. These limitations do not befall

Figure 1: An entry into the Pedway from the city grid.

the Pedway, however, for it is all “accident.” The Pedway’s restrictions are only its ability to navigate between the grid and the building, object and field, and beyond minimal interface and flexible points of access the grid holds no power underground. Like an earring hanging from an ear, outside of its point of contact with the structure (the piercing) the Pedway is free to do as it pleases.

This leads to another key, and defining, difference between the grid and the Pedway. While the grid delineates the city’s exterior, organizing its parts and producing the platforms and movement with which to view it; the Pedway carves out its interior. It ignores the grid’s hierarchy and inverts the orientation and subject-object relationship from centrifugal to centripetal. It gathers, holds, and condenses the public; linking many different topographies, programs and spaces in an enclosed circuit. As a contemporary form of interior urbanism, the Pedway acts as the true ground for the city, one made exclusively for the people.



2

LAYERS

Chicago is flat. This is a consequence of the last ice age in which the entire region existed as a lake bottom known as glacial Lake Chicago. This mundane and flat topography combined with the rare yet tragic opportunity to reimagine the urban context and its form after the city clearing fire of 1871 resulted in the invention of the layered city. Created not only as a means to introduce variation in topography, its layers serve as a testing ground for early functionalist notions of separation of systems.

With the creation of the layered city, the idea of “ground” in Chicago became an entirely artificial concept. There is no single ground in the city, but instead: grounds. 10 grounds, to be precise, that are divided into 4 superterranean and 6 subterranean levels. From highest to lowest, the superterranean levels consist of towers, the elevated train network, the street, and the river. The subterranean levels begin with the Pedway and service levels, the subway, freight tunnels, cable car tunnels, water tunnels, and the deep tunnel. The freight tunnels, unique to Chicago, and the cable car tunnels were created between 1882 and 1906 and are both now decommissioned and sealed. Yet they act as a first attempt at separating service and circulation from the city and public ground above. Quite

Figure 2: The Pedway nestled between Chicago’s subterranean layers and the city grid above.

logically, only the 4 superterranean levels define the iconography and identity of the city. Yet the city is as deep as it is tall, with the deep tunnel reaching 350 feet below ground or about the same height as SOM's famed Inland Steel building. The Pedway, acting as true ground to the city, is the interface between the superterranean space occupied by people and the subterranean space occupied by infrastructure.

While all the layers of the city produce artificial and changing topography, the Pedway is the only such layer that embodies the radical and abrupt change in topography found in the rolling hills of cities and regions further north. It extends 4 stories beneath the street and 3 stories above which gives rise to conditions where one can enter the Pedway deep underground but exit looking down on the street below.

Outside of its layered and topographical variety, the two most defining and compelling features of the Pedway are its anonymity and ambiguity. Hidden beneath the city's other layers, its overall form is never apparent, even to those who activate its spaces daily. This makes it difficult to recognize as a system separate from the other layers of the city. Outside of a sign here and medallion there the Pedway is mostly unidentifiable. Thousands of people occupy the Pedway on a daily basis yet almost none of them know they are doing so. It is at this moment, however, when the Pedway has achieved complete anonymity, that its greatest power is realized. It can affect behavior and distribute program in radical yet subtle ways that leave no traces of its pressures.



3



4

PROGRAM

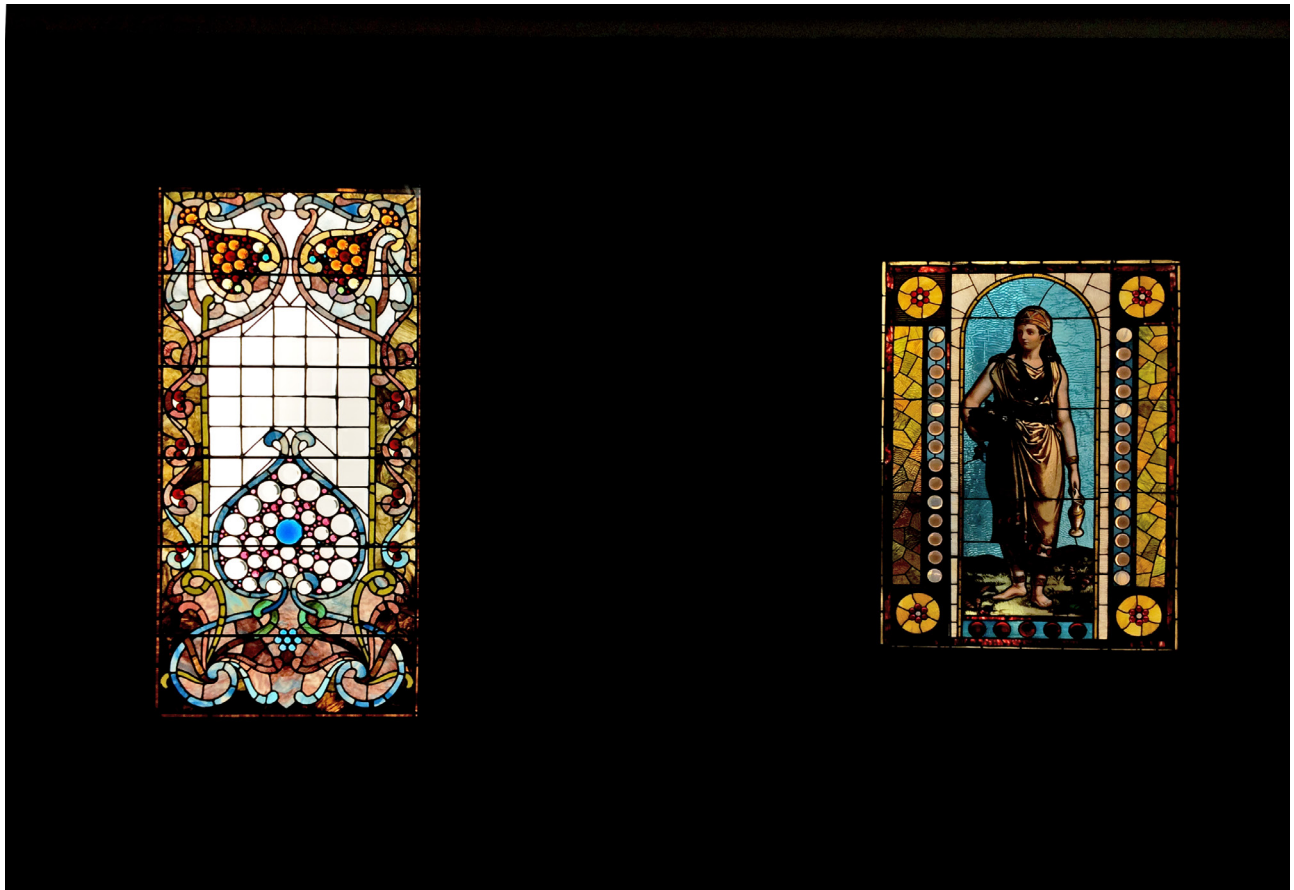
The program of the Pedway is defined by proximity to its surroundings and boasts an incredible range of types: retail, galleries, restaurants, recreation, institutions, government agencies, train stations, conference centers, hotels, office space, tower lobbies, parking lots, infrastructure, gardens, museums, and city hall all populate the Pedway. The activity and density of occupation is time and destination dependent. It ebbs and flows with busy periods during the morning and evening rush hours as well as during lunch. On the weekends, major citywide

Figure 3: The Pedway at its lowest infrastructural subterranean layer.

Figure 4: The Pedway as it connects to Millennium Station

events such as exhibitions, festivals, and concerts activate different portions of the Pedway depending on the event locations. There is a range of people who occupy the Pedway daily, from tourists to business people, students to concertgoers, and they all add to its atmosphere and attributes as a condenser and aggregator of difference.

The spaces and architectural characteristics of the Pedway are quite drastic in their variation. This diversity exists because of the Pedway's incremental development and contributes to the ambiguity of the system. Without consistency, even in the form of continuity, the Pedway has no defining features that produce unity. As such there are fantastic and abrupt transitions from one section to the next. A short walk from the overwrought and intricate train station ticketing area of Millennium Station through the track platforms and a pair of double doors leads to a vast infrastructural space that reveals multiple layers of the city and enormous mechanical ducts feeding the towers above. Given the peculiarities of each section of the Pedway, the upkeep and hours of access can vary greatly depending on which buildings or networks it is attached to. Lastly, there is an unexpected amount of art displayed on the Pedway walls. Given the sheer amount of vertical surface, it is not difficult to see why. Not much of the art is noteworthy, but it is there just in case, waiting to be observed.



5

Figure 5: Pieces from the American Victorian Stained Glass Window exhibition in a Pedway corridor.

As a system, the Pedway reflects the way the city used to be in that it has not yet been manicured in its entirety. It provides a range, an interface, and a backdrop. It creates spectacle but also reveals artifice. It is both authentic and a knockoff. It is continuous and produces connection, but it is disconnected. As an accessory and interior urbanism, it offers a unique urban typology for the contemporary city. One created collectively, incrementally, and without a plan, but with infinite potential.

ENDNOTES

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4. "Pedway--Downtown Pedestrian Walkway System." City of Chicago. Web. 24 Aug. 2014. <<http://www.cityofchicago.org/city/en/depts/cdot/provdrs/ped/svcs/pedway.html>>.
5. Koolhaas, Rem, Bruce Mau, Jennifer Sigler, and Hans Werlemann. *S, M, L, XL*. New York, N.Y.: Monacelli Press, 1995. Print.
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7. Gandelsonas, Mario. *The Urban Text*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991. Print.
8. Gandelsonas, Mario. *X-Urbanism: Architecture and the American City*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1999. Print.