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This issue features a series of photographs by Paul Hester that capture the unexpected beauty of the periphery.
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SUSAN ROGERS AND GREGORY MARINIC

In this special issue of Cite—the Beautiful Periphery—we explore the contemporary megalopolis of Houston beyond Loop 610. Sometimes derided, though largely cast off and ignored by the powerful and elite the increasingly diverse periphery is home to most Houstonians. Economies of scale, islands, and spines define this landscape and our mundane, everyday places give it form. Subdivisions, apartment complexes, strip malls, big box stores, and shopping malls—these pieces or fragments aggregate without seemingly adding up to anything more than discontinuous parts. At the same time, slowly and nearly indiscernibly, these places are appropriated and transformed into something beautiful.

Houston’s periphery is layered and imperfect—yet it is also organic and authentic. Our goal has been to explore this periphery and methods of its production, appropriation, and adaptation. Albert Pope, Gus Sessions Wortham Professor of Architecture at Rice University, shares his insights on the megalopolis and forces that shape our contemporary cities—concluding that “It is not possible to project a viable tomorrow if we remain willfully blind to the urbanism that we produce today.” Susan Rogers, Director of the Community Design Resource Center and Assistant Professor at the University of Houston, investigates 1970s era multifamily housing in Houston—the good, the bad, and the ugly—through the lens of change and adaptation. Natalia Beard of SWA Group shares a visually compelling and rich proposal for the flea markets along Airline Drive. Joseph Altshuler argues that the typical backyard fence is a potent instrument of organizational power and visible manifestation of the “cul-de-sac city,” sharing a series of playful proposals to transform this element of division into a point of connection. Judith K. De Jong, architect, urbanist, and Assistant Professor at the University of Illinois at Chicago School of Architecture, explores the mutations among urban and suburban strip malls and big box store typologies, while Allyn West gets up close to criticize the new Walmart on Wayside. Capturing the unexpected beauty of the periphery, photographs by Paul Hester are intermingled throughout this issue.

Houston—created incrementally and informally without a master plan or a grand vision other than its highways—reflects the human needs, daily routines, and conventional desires of its people. We must come to terms with the complexities, challenges, and futures of this landscape as a means to build a better city. We propose that, in fact, amid such seemingly adverse conditions, resilience, innovation, and adaptation are already driving transformative change.

SUSAN ROGERS AND GREGORY MARINIC
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Section</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>RDA NEWS AND CALENDAR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>OFFCITE HIGHLIGHT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sunday Streets HTX is Born</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>by Raj Mankad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>AN INTERVIEW WITH ALBERT POPE:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>When talking about Houston, the traditional terms of architecture quickly fall apart.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>by Susan Rogers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>THE [ BEAUTIFUL ] PROJECTS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Contradiction and Complexity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>by Susan Rogers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>AIRLINE MARKET MILE:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Inclusive Design for Growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>by Natalia Beard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>ON THE FENCE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Great fences make great neighbors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>by Joseph Altshuler</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>SUB/URBAN MUTATIONS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Developers inside the Loop could learn a thing or two from what’s happening outside the Loop.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>by Judith K. De Jong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td>WALMART TRANSCENDS THE DUMB BOX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Just not in Houston</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>by Allyn West</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td>MFAH SELECTS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>THE CORONER’S REPORT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(written by Ronnie Self)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>by David Heymann</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48</td>
<td>THE MIXED USE FUTURE OF NOW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>by Carrie Schneider</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Left: A “heat” map showing the density of multifamily housing in Houston. Graphic by Rose Lee.
In October 2013, Mayor Annise Parker unveiled Houston’s Complete Streets and Transportation Program, a series of policy goals to steer roadway improvement projects to incorporate the needs of pedestrians and cyclists. This policy is the latest in a series of proposals to help set a course for the future of Houston in order to meet the needs of one of the fastest growing urban populations in the country. This two-part civic forum will address both the aspirations and challenges facing our city through the lens of walkability.

Two $5,000 Rice Design Alliance Initiatives for Houston grants will be awarded for projects proposed by a faculty member, Gregory Marinic, and an undergraduate student, Giovanni Peña, at the Gerald D. Hines College of Architecture at the University of Houston. Guest jurors awarded the grants.

Marinic’s “Fifth Ward Renaissance” focuses on the rehabilitation of a “poetically crumbling” shotgun house into a community “e-reading room” or education center. The $5,000 grant will help to fund structural improvements to the building as well as an interior overhaul. Marinic’s students will collaborate with Pastor Robert Thomas, Jason Logan, and third-year interior architecture students, experimenting with digital fabrication technologies and engaging in interdisciplinary research, while working directly with the Fifth Ward CDC, Olivet Missionary Baptist Church, and the UH Community Design Resource Center led by Susan Rogers.
THE START OF A TRADITION
SUNDAY STREETS
A BIG SUCCESS

BY RAJ MANKAD

During the course of one and half years, and ten articles, OffCite writers proposed, petitioned, documented, analyzed, and publicized the temporary closure of streets to cars so they might be opened up for other uses and to other users. On March 5, 2014, Mayor Annise Parker announced a pilot program called Sunday Streets HTX that creates just such pedestrian and cycling promenades. OffCite’s most recent articles have celebrated the success of that pilot program. The first Sunday Street, along White Oak and Quitman, drew more than 3,000 people, in the rain. The City of Houston estimates that 20,000 came out on Westheimer for the second one. Mayor Parker said, “We are seeing the start of a tradition.” READ MORE AT OFFCITE.ORG/SUNDAY_STREETS.