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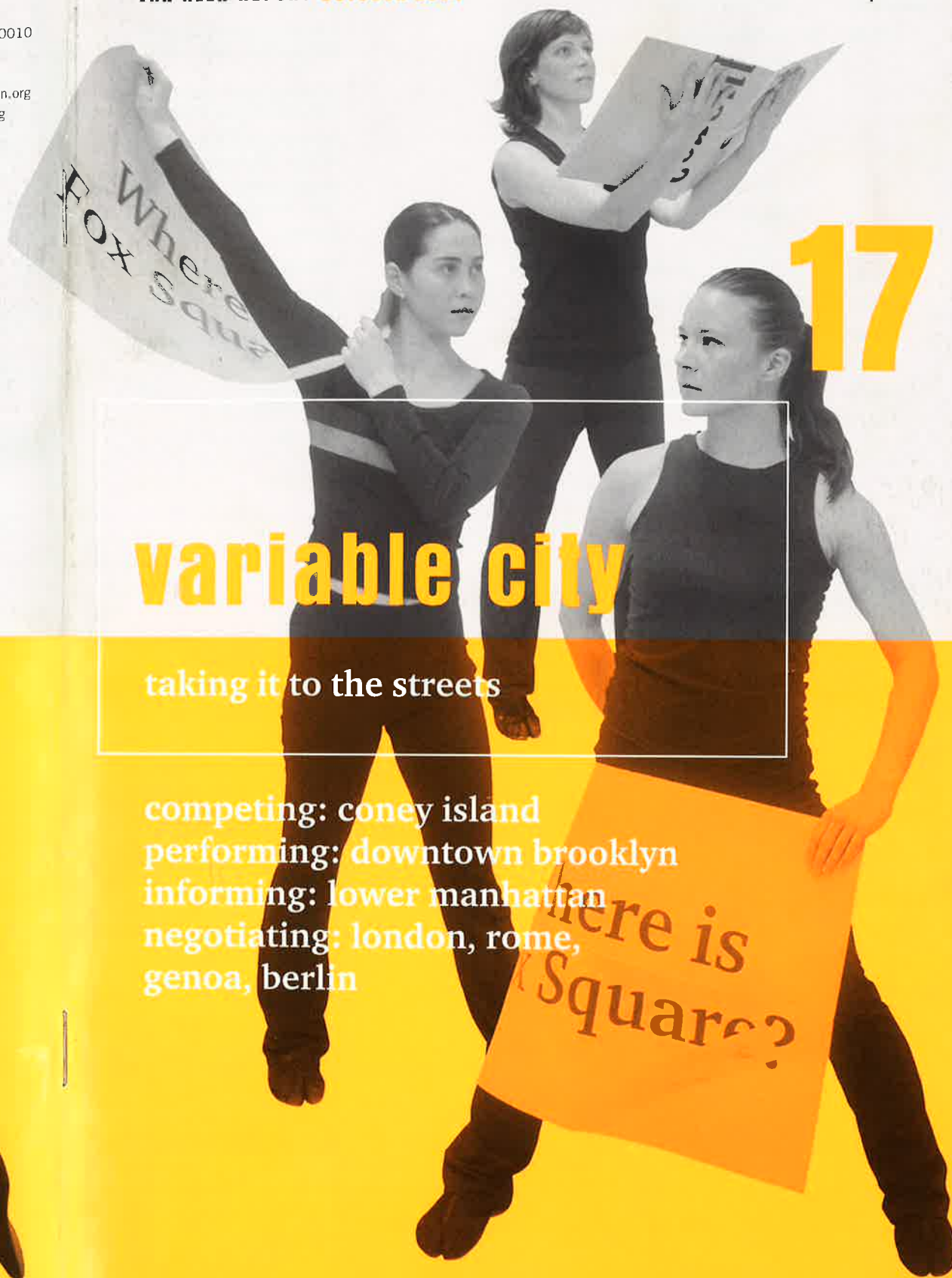
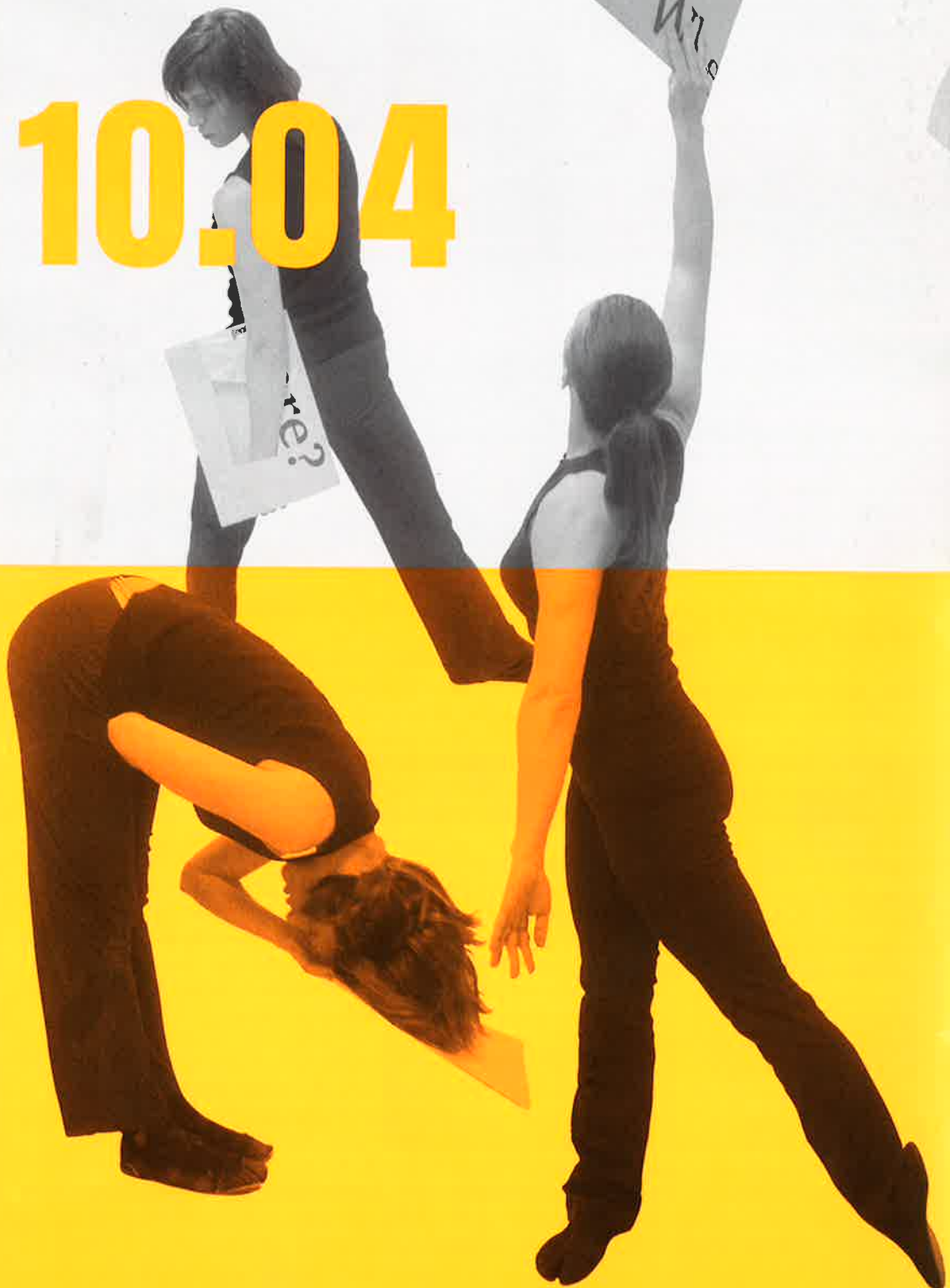
17

# variable city

taking it to the streets

competing: coney island  
performing: downtown brooklyn  
informing: lower manhattan  
negotiating: london, rome,  
genoa, berlin

where is  
square?



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Van Alen Institute is committed to improving the design of the public realm.

Our program of Projects in Public Architecture promotes education and action through design competitions, workshops, studies, forums, web sites, and publications including the **Van Alen Report**.

While the Institute grounds its work in New York City, we structure our projects to engage an interdisciplinary and international array of practitioners, policy-makers, students, educators, and community leaders.

#### VAN ALEN REPORT 17

Raymond W. Gastil Executive Director

Zoë Ryan Editor

Hello Graphic Design

Bethany Koby and Sidney Blank  
Graphic Design Consultants,  
VARIABLE CITY Section

Van Alen Report is published seasonally. Subscriptions are a benefit of membership and are also independently available to libraries and universities. Individual issues can be purchased at our gallery and in bookstores. For more information, call 212.924.7000.

William Van Alen (1882-1954), the Institute's namesake and historically the most significant benefactor, was the architect of New York City's 1930 landmark Chrysler Building.

On the cover: VARIABLE CITY performance movements  
Photo: J Mandle Performance



# director's letter

When VAI undertook **OPEN: new designs for public space** last year, we deliberately focused on the merit of strong, expressive designs as crucial to the future of public space and architecture in the city. We stand by that commitment, yet this Report underscores the importance of keeping an open mind on how to arrive at a design. There's as much to learn from the street as the studio, and no final formula for making a great city.

We're pleased to be able to present the **VARIABLE CITY** project because its interdisciplinary team took on a complex site's past, present, and future with everything from dancing to surveying, combining a strong esthetic with direct research. In a time when everything about public space is getting harder, it is gratifying to see that the unexpected is still possible, from performers in orange crossing the street to interviewers asking strangers what they think of it all. The goal: to learn something that they didn't already know.

From our perspective, this goal runs through our 2004 program, from the summer exhibit of **Texture City** with its thesis of negotiated space to the Stadtblind team's spring exhibit on the **Colors of Berlin** that found the city's overlooked urbanity, to the Dinkelloo Fellow's work on **London's ubiquitous surveillance technology**. **Textures, colors, variables**: this attention to experience and detail critical to a culturally "performative" public architecture will be key to our 2004-05 program as we move forward with exhibits, forums, and competitions, from information-rich downtowns to leisure-rich waterfronts and the international exchange to inform them. We don't know what competitors in our competitions will design, what urban thinkers will say at our conferences, or what the private and public sectors will embrace, and that's precisely the point.

Raymond W. Gastil





VARIABLE CITY: FOX SQUARE PERFORMANCE, 2003 PHOTO: EMILY DRAZEN

From my first visit to the Stable, Julia Mandle's studio in Dumbo, to being out on Fox Square in downtown Brooklyn and watching performers interrupt pedestrian flow and mark the site with their movements, **VARIABLE CITY: Fox Square** has revealed itself as a project that speaks volumes for the importance of multi-disciplinary approaches to urban regeneration. The project, the vision of **Julia Mandle** and **Ariel Krasnow**—currently presented in an Institute-curated exhibition in our gallery, designed by **Bethany Koby** and **Sidney Blank**—builds on our existing programs that have emphasized the important role art can play in city design, and forms the inspiration for this issue of the Report.

Focused on interventions, events, and designs that spark interest in and animate our city streets, this edition, expanded to 40 pages, has a special section devoted to **VARIABLE CITY**, which opens with our first ever centerfold poster. Acting as a catalogue to the Institute's exhibition, the Report includes essays, which provide further insights into the innovative hybrid of urban design research and performance art initiated with choreographer Mark Jarecke. Additional texts provide a context for their work with examples of other innovative practices that connect performance and observation to proposals for the public architecture of the city.

Our regular **updates on Institute projects** remain the focus of the first half of the Report, and includes a feature article by the recent **Dinkeloo Fellow, Michael Chen** based on his research undertaken in London, Rome and Genoa.

As always we hope to prompt fresh thinking and debate about design in public space and welcome your comments.

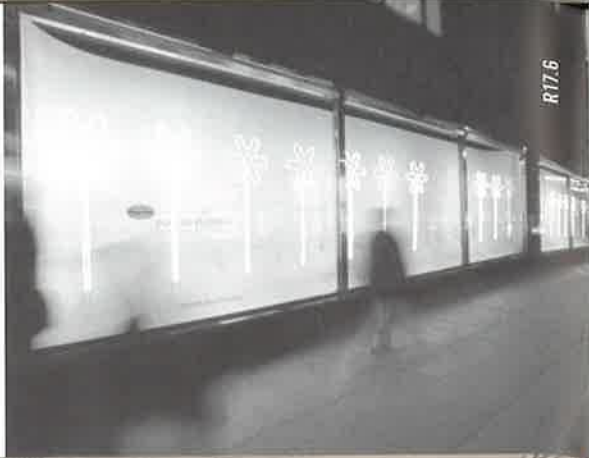
**Email us at: [zryan@vanalen.org](mailto:zryan@vanalen.org)**

**Zoë Ryan**

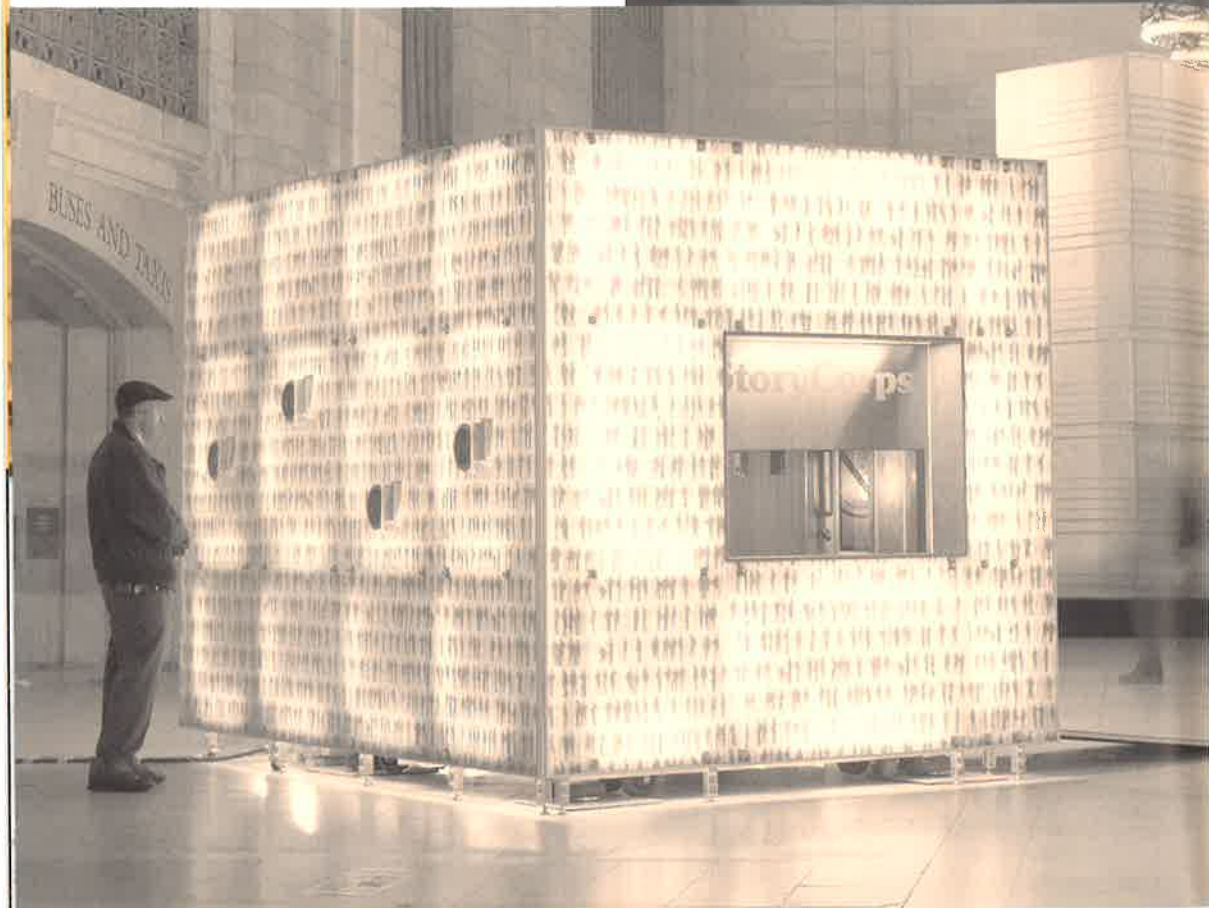
## editor's letter



# civic exchange



This July, four teams—**ANTENNA DESIGN, LEESER/STOSS/LEVIN, LOCAL NETWORKS, AND MESH/ORG**—stood out from an impressive pool of respondents competing to undertake designing an installation for Lower Manhattan. Conceived as an interactive venue that will provide information and stimulate place-based education, the exchange is also intended to animate the appearance and experience of Lower Manhattan's public spaces.



including the MTA/NYCT MetroCard vending machines, R142 Subway Car, and various art and design installations. Leeser/StoSS/Levin brings together architect Thomas Leeser, landscape architect Chris Reed, and world-renowned media artist Golan Levin. Local Networks pulls together a range of disciplines and expertise: Inbar Barak for interactive design; Jake Barton, head of Local Projects, for interactive design; Claudia Herasme for urban design; Dan Shifman, a researcher and educator at New York University's Interactive Telecommunications Program, for interactive programming; Rosten Woo, co-director of the Center for Urban Pedagogy, for urban participation design; and Guy Zucker for architecture. Lastly, MESH/ORG combines the talents of Eric Liftin, architect and founder of MESH Architectures, and David Reinfurt, graphic designer and founder of ORG inc. The two have worked together on projects including the mobile recording studio for the StoryCorps interview project in Grand Central Station, and between them have designed projects across a range of temporal, wireless, and information experiences.

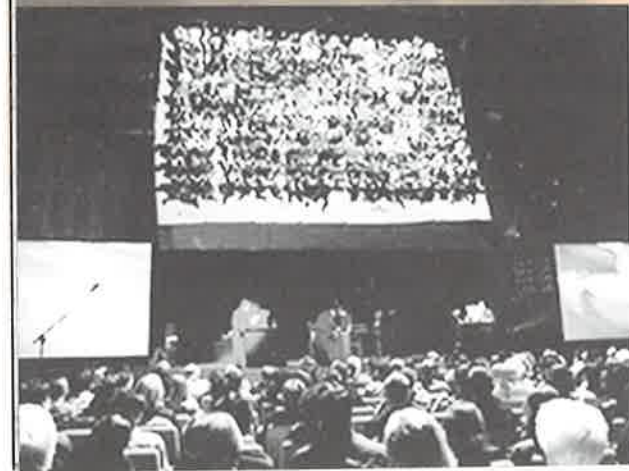
The finalists are asked to consider not only the form, but also the interface and precise content of the project, merging interactive design with architecture in a single urban intervention.

The finalists were selected from responses to an earlier Request for Expressions of Interest by: Janet Abrams, Director, Design Institute, University of Minnesota; Kadambari Baxi, Partner with Martin/Baxi Architects and principal of imageMachine; and Tucker Viemeister, President, Springtime-USA together with the project organizers. Competition manager Jonathan Cohen-Litant states, "We are delighted with the selection committee's choice of four finalists. It is an exciting moment as we look forward to the results of this next stage of the process, in which these teams of extremely high caliber and a proven record for innovative design are expected to think 'beyond the kiosk.'"

Each team will be awarded a \$10,000 stipend to develop their project proposals. A jury, including John Maeda (Media Artist/Computer Scientist, and Co-Director of the SIMPLICITY Consortium at MIT's Media Lab) and Michael Rock (Designer and Partner, 2x4—a multidisciplinary design studio), will evaluate and select one of the four finalist schemes this fall. The final schemes will be presented to a broader audience following the jury evaluation.

The CIVIC EXCHANGE competition's project partners are Van Alen Institute and The Architectural League of New York, with the cooperation of the Hugh L. Carey Battery Park City Authority. The competition is funded by the National Endowment for the Arts with additional funding provided by the Stephen A. and Diana L. Goldberg Foundation.

Antenna Design, the New York-based duo of Masamichi Udagawa and Sigi Moeslinger, has created an extraordinary range of realized design projects,



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R17/8

# films on the city, governors island

**WE DID IT AGAIN THANKS TO OUR PROJECT PARTNERS AND SPONSORS! VAN ALLEN INSTITUTE'S 2ND ANNUAL OPEN VIEWS EVENT, CONNECTING A GREAT NEW PUBLIC SPACE WITH INDEPENDENT PROGRAMMING, WAS A GREAT SUCCESS.**

On Friday, August 6th, Van Alen Institute in collaboration with **ROOFTOP FILMS**, celebrated New York's newest public space. Following last year's event on Southpoint, Roosevelt Island, the Institute worked with the **GOVERNORS ISLAND PRESERVATION AND EDUCATION CORPORATION (GIPEC)** to organize the first ever outdoor screening on the island's Parade Grounds, sponsored by **TARGET STORES**.

This free event attracted almost 1000 people who lined up on Slip 7 at the Battery Maritime Building to board the ferry to Governors Island. Live music and free Target pillows greeted movie-goers. At sundown the evening proceeded with a series of independent short films. The location provided an unparalleled venue, enriching the experience of watching films and expanding the public's awareness and appreciation of the site.

JONATHAN COHEN-LITANT

# OPEN updates

**THE INSTITUTE'S RECENT EXHIBIT "OPEN: NEW DESIGNS FOR PUBLIC SPACE" WILL OPEN AT THE NATIONAL BUILDING MUSEUM IN JANUARY 2005, AT A TIME WHEN THERE HAVE BEEN BOTH ADVANCES AND SETBACKS TO THE PROJECTS IT FEATURES.**

In Toronto, **H2O PARK** is moving rapidly towards implementation, with its interdisciplinary team including **JANET ROSENBERG ASSOCIATES LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS**, based in Toronto, and **CLAUDE CORMIER ARCHITECTES PAYSAGISTES, INC.**, based in Montreal, as well as New York's **LENI SCHWENDINGER** for lighting design among other team members. Cormier has also teamed up with **ENVISION-THE HOUGH GROUP** and **E.R.A. ARCHITECTS** for the design of another nearby waterfront park, **COMMISSIONERS PARK**, confirming the sense that Toronto is determined to develop a waterfront at the forefront of global design and development. As **ROBERT FUNG**, Chair of the **TORONTO WATERFRONT REVITALIZATION CORPORATION** which is developing the park as well as vast stretches of the central waterfront, has said in a recent discussion with VAI: "The question is how far we buy into the concept of revitalization. Revitalization doesn't mean 'fundamental economics,' it's not 1+1=3,4,5, or 6. How do you balance fundamental economics with quality of life goals? [In the overall scope of the TWRC] we are taking this to a level of sustainability not yet seen in an area of this size in North America."

Among the other projects of note in the exhibit, **FOREIGN OFFICE ARCHITECTS' SOUTH-EAST COASTAL PARK AND AUDITORIUMS** officially opened as part of the city's 141-day **UNIVERSAL FORUM OF CULTURES** events. Landscape architect **KATHRYN GUSTAFSON'S WESTERGAS-FABRIEK PARK** opened in Amsterdam, as did her **LURIE GARDEN** at Chicago's magnificent new Millennium Park (cited in an OPEN catalogue essay). Less copacetically, London-based architect **WILL ALSOP'S** go-getting scheme for Liverpool, the iconic Cloud cultural facility planned for the **MERSEY WATERFRONT**, due to be completed in time for the city's year as European capital of culture in 2008, appears to have been cancelled due to cost increases, yet it is hoped that some aspect of its vision can be incorporated into a bold new waterfront.

In New York, the **FRESH KILLS PROJECT** is moving towards breaking ground with the design by **JAMES CORNER** and the **FIELD OPERATIONS** firm he leads, while the **BROOKLYN BRIDGE PARK DESIGN** led by **MICHAEL VAN VALKENBERGH** is also moving towards realization. On **ROOSEVELT ISLAND**, the **TRUST FOR PUBLIC LAND** has initiated a design study of alternatives for **SOUTHPOINT**, and has begun a series of public meetings garnering support. The **WEISS/MANFREDI ARCHITECTS** design remains a key part of the **NEW YORK OLYMPIC BID** for 2012, which will continue to be developed as **NYC2012** and its design consultants drive towards the final city selection in 2005.

Washington DC, not directly included in the exhibit as formatted at the Institute, will, however, figure into the program at the **NATIONAL BUILDING MUSEUM**, and there has never been a more critical time to address public space in the nation's capital. The city is reeling with security concerns, its ongoing dilemma of the mall called upon to serve as both the conscience and fairgrounds of a nation, and the opportunity to implement an extraordinary new plan for the waterfront of the **ANACOSTIA RIVER**, as the District pushes forward its urban identity.

Washington has been the site of several major design competitions, and much controversy, and one key part of the **OPEN EXHIBIT** is news about the increasing role of design competitions throughout North America. Recent news includes the selection of **RTM ARCHITECTS'** design for the **BEALE STREET LANDING** on the Memphis riverfront, as well as ongoing improvements and revisions to their overall plan. In Portland, **ANGELIL/GRAHAM/PFENNINGER/SCHOLL ARCHITECTURE'S** winning design for the **NORTH MACADAM-MARQUAM HILL AERIAL TRAM** is in the early construction documents phase, the design is scheduled to begin construction in early 2005.



## PROGRAM

The **Parachute Pavilion: an Open Design Competition for Coney Island** will encourage talented designers worldwide to generate innovative proposals for a project that contributes to a 21st Century vision for Coney Island. In concert with the **Coney Island Development Corporation's (CIDC)** planning initiatives, **Van Alen Institute (VAI)** will direct a competition for a project ambitious in program and design on a significant site in Coney Island's amusement district, and in the shadow of the famed Parachute Jump, an iconic reminder of Coney Island history that is now a designated landmark. The design will play a key role in the ongoing revival of Coney Island, with implications for urban recreation in New York City waterfront communities and beyond.

The Parachute Pavilion is planned to be an all-season activity generator, drawing the public onto the boardwalk, the beach and Surf Avenue to a new recreational destination. Throughout history, pavilions have acted as catalysts for animating parks, waterfronts, and urban districts, by accommodating a myriad of recreational and commercial activities as well as being paradigms of design excellence. This competition will invite designers to stretch the limits of what a pavilion can be, both formally and programmatically, connecting it to both the history and future of Coney Island.

## SITE

**Coney Island**, the once and future "playground of the world," embodies opportunities and challenges. Its rich history is equally as layered, as the site has at various times played many roles in the lives and imaginations of New Yorkers and the world. Today, Coney Island is in the midst of a revival, spurred by the efforts of public, private, and community initiatives. In the last four years, the amusement area has witnessed ever-greater crowds at annual events from the Mermaid Parade and competitive eating contests, to rock concerts and mini marathons, to baseball games at Keyspan Park, the home of the Brooklyn Cyclones.

The **Parachute Pavilion** will be strategically located to capitalize on this evolving scene. At the site of the legendary former Steeplechase Park—once home to the Pavilion of Fun—and adjacent to the landmarked Parachute Jump and Keyspan Park, the Pavilion should embody Coney Island's identity as a site for amusement rides, spectator sports and events, all within an oceanfront context. At the intersection of the boardwalk, Keyspan Park, Steeplechase Pier, and the Parachute Jump, the new pavilion will enhance the connection between Surf Avenue and the boardwalk. Potential programs for the pavilion may include: a café concession for food, beverages and souvenirs to service the boardwalk, Steeplechase Pier, and the neighboring ice rink and playing fields, indoor and outdoor movie screenings, a skate park and shop, a temporary exhibition space, an education center, and a locus of games and events all year round. The pavilion will reinforce the Parachute Jump as a memorable icon of Coney Island's renewal, while also becoming an icon and a destination in its own right.

## SCHEDULE

SEPTEMBER 2004	COMPETITION ANNOUNCEMENT—EARLY REGISTRATION BEGINS
NOVEMBER 2004	FULL COMPETITION BRIEF AVAILABLE
FEBRUARY 2005	REGISTRATION ENDS
APRIL 2005	SUBMISSIONS DUE
APRIL 2005	SUBMISSIONS EXHIBITED TO THE PUBLIC
MAY 2005	WINNERS ANNOUNCED

## ABOUT CIDC

The **Coney Island Development Corporation** works to make Coney Island a year-round, world-class recreational oceanfront destination through business development, job creation, new housing, neighborhood improvement, and unique cultural events. Its goals are: to develop year-round businesses to strengthen the Coney Island economy and encourage the development and retention of existing businesses; to facilitate the development of vacant and underutilized properties; and to encourage the development of new housing to create a stable consumer base in the neighborhood.

# the parachute pavilion: an open design competition for coney island





# negotiating the textured city

JACKLYNN ARNDT, PROJECTS IN PUBLIC ARCHITECTURE INTERN, SUMMER 2004

NEGOTIABLE SPACE, THE TOPIC FOR A DISCUSSION AT VAN ALLEN INSTITUTE ON JULY 21, 2004, WAS AN OPPORTUNITY TO EXPLORE FURTHER THE INITIATIVES OF CANADIAN ARCHITECT MARC BOUTIN AND HIS RESEARCH WHILE IN ROME AS THE RECIPIENT OF THE 2002 CANADIAN HOME PRIZE. HELD IN ASSOCIATION WITH "TEXTURE CITY," AN EXHIBITION ON VIEW THIS SUMMER AT VAI, BOUTIN'S INSIGHTS WERE FOLLOWED BY COMMENTS FROM ARCHITECTS JAMES SLADE AND MICHAEL BELL.

Boutin's research concentrated on reexamining the archetypal public space, the Roman piazza. Through documentation undertaken over the course of a year, and at times over 24 hours, he revealed the quality of each space, refuting the idea of Rome as a city of static imagery. Photographs were taken from waist level showing the multiple layers of people, traffic, temporary elements, and existing architecture to expose what Boutin believes to be "a collapse between public and private forming one texture." While in Rome, Boutin developed a number of proposals for increasing the activity and efficiency of public spaces such as Piazza San Cosimato, an old market square still catering to food stalls, in the Trastevere district. Drawing a section through the square, Boutin showed, "an embedded infrastructure that has the capacity to change over time" in response to shifting conditions: the basis of negotiable space.

Boutin has since brought his research to bear on the work of his studio, most prominently in the design of the New Varscona Theater in Edmonton, Alberta. Renowned for its outdoor film festivals but cold climate, the site prompted a design that was flexible to change. The main accent is the front-sliding façade. Boutin explains "When the

façade is closed, the theatre can act in a conventional sense by enclosing the audience around a stage, but during exterior performances the street becomes the audience and the theatre foyer opens to become the stage."

James Slade, of Slade Architecture in New York furthered the discussion by presenting a project he has recently completed with partner Minsuk Cho. Stimulated by a popular cartoon, the Dalki Store/Theme Park in Heyri, South Korea includes misted, heated, chilled, noisy, quiet, flat, steep, smooth and more rugged zones that Slade refers to as "performative surfaces." These environments "rely on trust in the individual but empower people to decide what is something they can negotiate and something they cannot," countering the rooted claims of apathetic architecture.

Michael Bell, an architect and professor of architecture at Columbia University, referenced Palazzo Littorio, designed by Lingeri Terragni for a competition in 1934 for its implicit texture. Envisioned for large-scale political events in Rome, Bell suggested that the arrangement and geometry of Terragni's architecture attempted to foster negotiable space where "the distance between the viewer and the action or the stage and the audience begins to be dismantled." Circumnavigating to present-day Houston, Bell also exposed the inverse of the Roman texture: sprawl and sub-standard urban density, which has caused the figural image of the city to disperse.

By its very nature, negotiable space is indefinable. However the diversity of projects and ideas presented proved it to be a tangible matter.

R17.12

# SECURE BENEATH THE WATCHFUL EYES

TRANSPORT FOR LONDON ADVERTISEMENT

## statistical bodies, database cities

MICHAEL CHEN

AS THE VAN ALLEN INSTITUTE DINKELOO FELLOW, MICHAEL CHEN SPENT TWO MONTHS IN RESIDENCY AT THE AMERICAN ACADEMY IN ROME (DECEMBER 2003-JANUARY 2004), BEFORE TRAVELING TO LONDON AND GENOA TO BUILD ON HIS RESEARCH AND DOCUMENT SECURITY SYSTEMS AND PRACTICES IN THESE CITIES. THIS SUMMER, MICHAEL CHEN PRESENTED HIS RESEARCH AT THE INSTITUTE. THIS ARTICLE, TAKEN FROM THE PRESENTATION WAS ADAPTED BY THE AUTHOR.

NOW IN ITS 25TH YEAR, THE DINKELOO FELLOWSHIP GIVES EMERGING DESIGNERS AN INVALUABLE OPPORTUNITY TO TRAVEL AND STUDY INDEPENDENTLY AT THE AMERICAN ACADEMY IN ROME.

MAYOR OF LONDON

Always on getting better



**IT COMES AS NO SURPRISE THAT THE TRACKING AND CROSS-REFERENCING OF PERSONAL DATA HAS EMERGED AS ONE OF THE MOST POWERFUL AND PERSUASIVE COMPONENTS OF CONTEMPORARY SECURITY MEASURES.**

Promotional material from Seisint, the Florida-based developer of computer systems that cross-reference information from sources like vehicle registration, law enforcement, and real estate databases states that "when enough seemingly insignificant data is analyzed against billions of data elements, the invisible becomes visible."<sup>1</sup> Moreover, this newly visible information has a powerful effect on the development of the city.

Initiatives including provisions of the US PATRIOT Act that permit library borrowing patterns to be used in determining who is subject to search fall into this category of database-enhanced monitoring, as does the Transportation Safety Administration's program to assign a threat assessment rating to everyone who purchases an airline ticket. The airport is certainly the most intense example of a visible command and control structure that people generally encounter and one of the last places where this type of disciplinary structure is rendered quite so clearly. Security environments are no longer located exclusively within institutional or infrastructural settings. The aim of contemporary security regimes is for control to proliferate widely, distributed throughout the public sphere.

**CONTEMPORARY SECURITY** is based in part on common technologies of surveillance. But where conventional surveillance aims to record people's activities through cinematic means, contemporary security is *dataveillant*, employing the power of computing and the database to identify, track, preempt, and ultimately to control behaviors.<sup>2</sup> Dataveillance harnesses the power of biometrics and other types of automatic recognition to reduce the act of identification to a matter of numerical quantities. One's life is no longer tied to material or social realities but rather a collection of quantifiable characteristics: telephone, social security, driver's license, etc.

The pervasiveness of voluntary mechanisms—from GPS positioning in automobiles to implants in the family dog to radio tags on every item at the Prada store or the Wal-Mart—already comprises a powerful generator of tracking data. Added to this mix are technologies of identification, biometrics and numerical recognition that have become widely available and employed in the workplace and used to monitor public places and events such as the 2000 Superbowl in Tampa where recognition software was used to scan the crowd and cross reference facial data against police and anti-terrorist databases.<sup>3</sup>

The goal of these types of information and imaging technologies is to link biological substrates to statistical data. **WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS OF THIS TECHNOLOGY FOR ARCHITECTURE AND OTHER DISCIPLINES CONCERNED WITH URBAN AND PUBLIC SPACES?** Consider what happens when a body is tracked. A particular type of corporeality emerges here; a hybrid statistical body that permanently links physical bodies to records of behavior in a format that is identifiable and made searchable, analyzable, and controllable. These systems are enabled by technologies that provide continual and variable reassessment for how control is administered and enforced.<sup>4</sup>

Just as our physical bodies are housed within certain structures and organizations, this emerging hybrid body, which is constituted through the simultaneity of physical and statistical bodies, is incorporated into other systems. Architecture has long been acknowledged as an agent of transmission for incorporeal forces of power and analysis where the physical form of the bureaucratic institutions of hospitals, schools and prisons are refined to produce and correspond directly to a specific diagram of control. If the migration of control from within the eroded boundaries of disciplinary and institutional citadels into the public sphere is facilitated by the advent of dataveillance, contemporary security technology and the hybrid bodies it inscribes will surely have a profound impact on the physical environment. This technology and its role as an agent of control and inscription fundamentally alters the relationship between bodies and public and urban spaces which become through their monitoring, organs of control themselves.

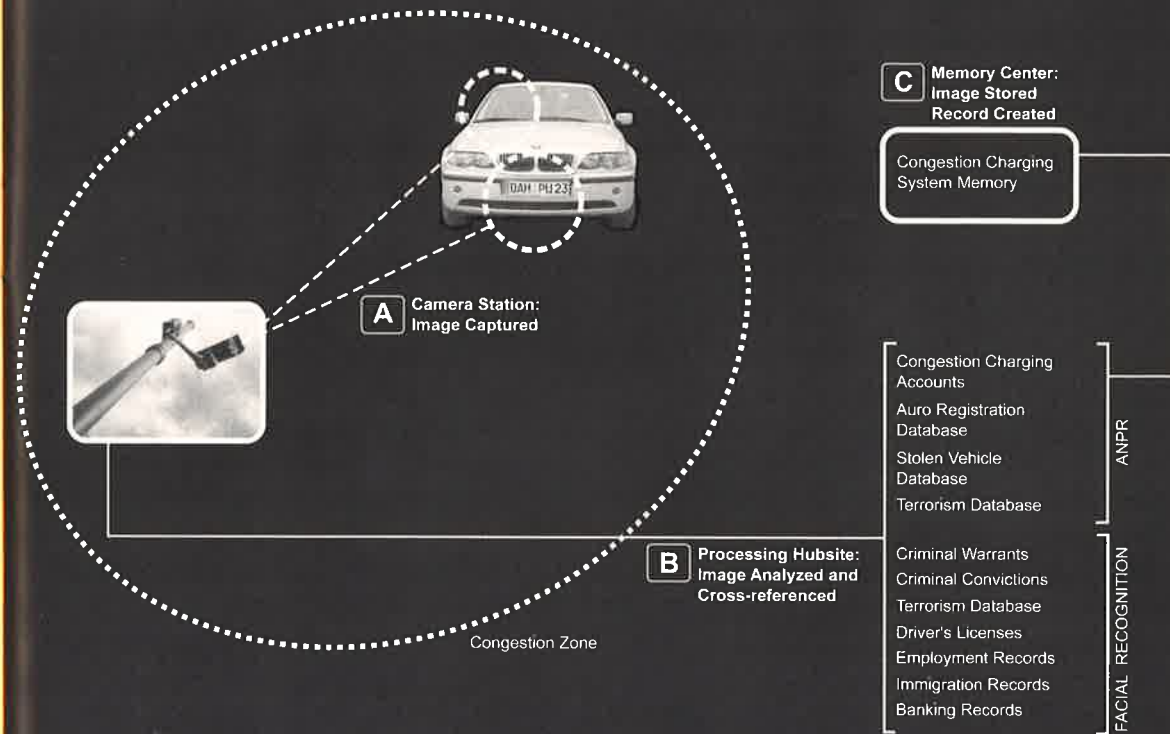


IMAGE CAPTURE AND ANALYSIS. ILLUSTRATION: MICHAEL CHEN

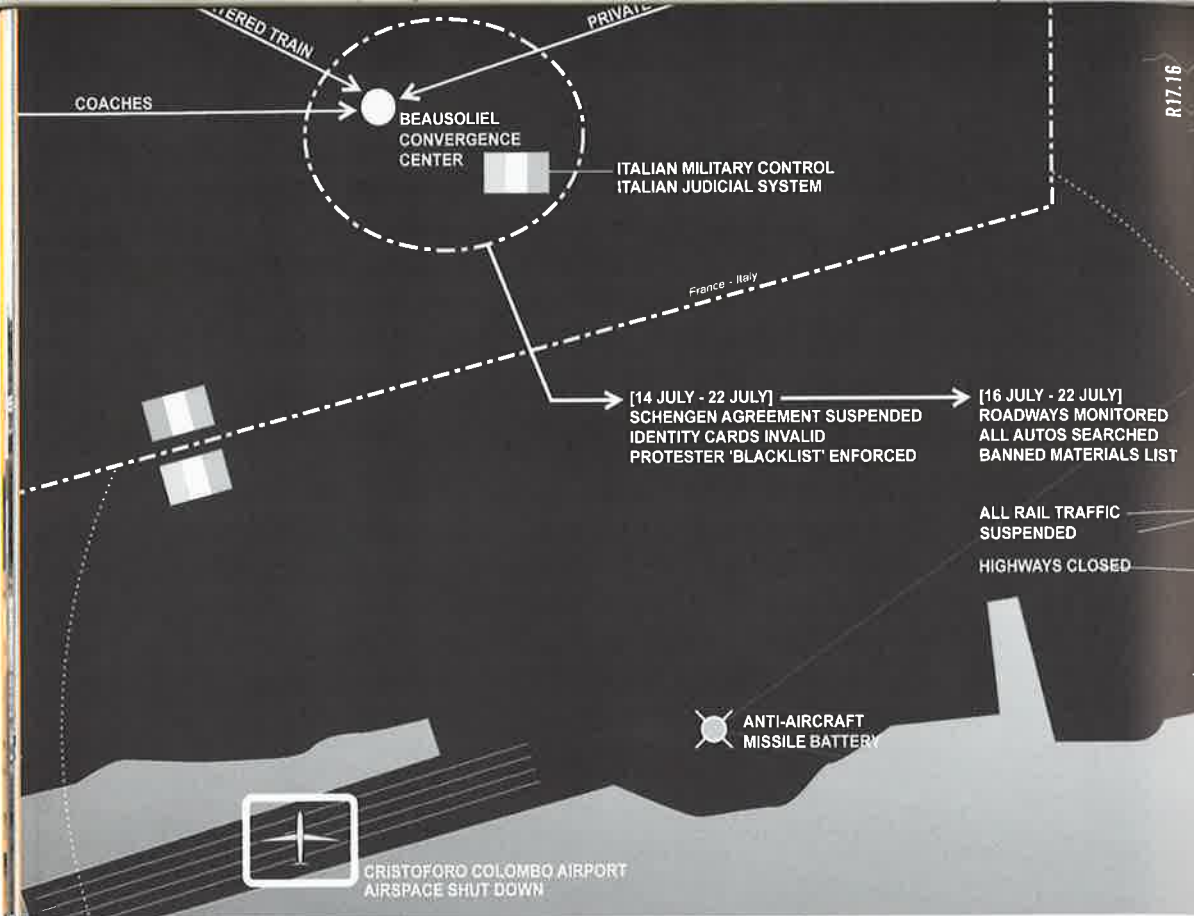
One such system is **LONDON'S CONGESTION CHARGING PROGRAM**, which went live in February of 2003. The system employs numerous cameras, mobile units and tracking software to identify and plot the path of every automobile entering Central London. The zone is indicated with numerous street markings and signage that announce the boundary of the zone, reminding motorists to pay the charge and directing attention to the cameras. These cameras send images to a processing hub where an automatic numerical plate recognition (ANPR) system reads the license plate and cross-references it against a number of available databases. Each car entering the congestion zone is automatically charged £5 per day and the system is projected to generate £80 million in profit each year, which must be directed back to London's public transportation system.

The recognition technology allows for relatively seamless flow across the perimeter, but the perimeter has already begun to imprint itself on the physical body of the city. Monitoring indicates that many people drive up to the edge of the zone and take public transportation into the center. The immaterial perimeter of the congestion zone has already begun to ossify in its first year of operation. Traffic is more intense around the edge of the zone and parking is more difficult. This hardening is one factor that is continually monitored and the perimeter is adjusted accordingly.

**IN ADDITION TO THE BENEFITS OF ENHANCED TRAFFIC FLOW AND IMPROVED PEDESTRIAN SAFETY AND AIR QUALITY, SECURITY IS POISED TO BE LEVERAGED AS A POWERFUL ENGINE FOR DEVELOPMENT INSIDE THE PERIMETER.**

Already a massive generator of revenue, the system produces what is arguably one of the most secure zones of the city, contributing to the production of ever more protected enclaves like the "Ring of Steel" surrounding the financial district and the measures used to protect individual buildings and governmental precincts. The commercial benefits of enhanced security within such secure enclaves are numerous, but these enclaves themselves obviously contribute toward a partitioning of the city that is not as immaterial or porous to public flows of people, cultures, and markets as first advertised.





The *Guardian* reported in February of 2003 that facial recognition would be used with pedestrians and motorists alike captured producing what that paper characterized as “one of the most daunting defense systems protecting a major world city.”<sup>6</sup> Speaking on Sky News, London mayor Ken Livingston confirmed that the cameras would be used to assist law enforcement saying, “if a terrorist group is trying to drive in we can identify the car, it can be flagged up instantly and we can even possibly be in a position where we can recognize the driver.”<sup>7</sup> A pilot program, launched in November of 2002 by the British Home Office to test ANPR systems in nine municipalities in England and Wales, increased arrests per police officer more than tenfold for a variety of offenses.<sup>8</sup>

**THE MIGRATION OF SUCH MONITORING TECHNOLOGIES FROM MILITARY OR CORPORATE CONTEXTS TO PUBLIC ONES HAS PROMPTED PROTEST FROM CIVIL LIBERTY AND PRIVACY ADVOCATES.**

It has also spawned a range of tactical media techniques designed to draw attention to surveillance technologies in public spaces. Techniques of protest organization such as the affinity groups, which derive from anarchist and workers’ ideas about decentralized organizations, are one such tactic. Each affinity group of ten to fifteen people is fairly independent from other groups at a protest action. The Internet makes it possible for much of the planning and training to be done in advance. There are no leaders per se present during the direct action and groups make their own decisions during the protest independent of a command hierarchy. A networked organization makes it possible to mobilize large numbers of people quickly and for their movements to emerge in response to local conditions.

This organizational model has been widely applied at anti-globalization demonstrations especially the large-scale international protests that take place around meetings of the WTO, World Bank, IMF and G-8. Prior to the WTO protests in Seattle for example, thousands of participants were given a course in nonviolence training, jail preparation, first aid, and street theater. How do these organizations impact the city? The substantial expenditure of material and capital to renovate existing city centers, outfit them with security devices, and to repair damage from protests are one area. One finds this evident in cities like Genoa where

streets and busy piazzas in the medieval center, converted to pedestrian use for the G8 conference, contribute to the vitality of the city center. The temporary and mobile urbanism of the protest movement of convergence centers, media outlets, outdoor conference venues, temporary housing, and self defense body armor are another, enlivening often neglected outdoor spaces.

New organizations develop to resist distributed control, much in the way that trade unions developed in resistance to the disciplinary control of the factory.<sup>9</sup> These models resistance are emerging at many scales, and in networked and spontaneous social behaviors like the flash mob phenomenon. Occurrences like these, while largely without specific purpose, point to the degree to which contemporary technologies and techniques of organization are also active in transforming the way the city is inhabited. New methods of mapping and engaging the city through communications and tracking technologies are becoming possible with new types of activism and leisure emerging as a result.

**SECURITY HAS LONG BEEN A FACTOR IN THE SHAPING OF CITIES**, and contemporary dataveillance is a monumental material practice that not unlike the wall inevitably produces its own protocols and organizations, engaging not only the physical form of the city, but its function, cultures, and economies. Dataveillance permanently links people and their bodies to networks of information and control. Such security devices open a new terrain where variability and negotiation are not limited to the surfaces of the city but continue to be ever present and significant characteristics of the interrelational organization of information and bodies and constructed and constructive matter. The result is a rich and restlessly transforming urbanism.

<sup>1</sup> Schwartz, John “Privacy fears Erode Support for a Network to fight Crime” *The New York Times* (online), March 15, 2004  
<sup>2</sup> Jordan Crandall, “Armed Vision” *Drive* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hajte Canz Publishers, 2002)  
<sup>3</sup> John D. Woodward, Jr, *Super Bowl Surveillance: Facing up to Biometrics* (Santa Monica: Rand Inc, 2001)  
<sup>4</sup> Gilles Deleuze, “Postscript on Control Societies” *Negotiations 1972-1990* (New York: Columbia, 1995)  
<sup>5</sup> Transport for London, “Congestion Charging: 11 Key Numbers” (online) [http://www.tfl.gov.uk/tfl/cc/ondon/cc\\_fact\\_sheet\\_key\\_numbers.shtml](http://www.tfl.gov.uk/tfl/cc/ondon/cc_fact_sheet_key_numbers.shtml)  
<sup>6</sup> Mark Townsend and Paul Harris, “Security Role for Traffic Cameras” *The Guardian Unlimited* (online), February 9, 2003  
<sup>7</sup> John Lettice “London Charge Zone is Security Cordon Too, Says Mayor” *The Register* (online), February 21, 2003  
<sup>8</sup> “Criminal Car Scanning Trial ‘Success’” *BBC News UK edition* (online), September 9, 2003  
<sup>9</sup> Gilles Deleuze, “Postscript on Control Societies” *Negotiations 1972-1990* (New York: Columbia, 1995)



1 FLATBUSH AVENUE

R17.20

VARIABLE

CITY:



your own thoughts,

Interested in testing the boundaries of their respective disciplines, VARIABLE CITY developed into more than 100 performances, by 12 dancers, over 4 weeks during the lunchtime and rush hour. Disrupting the hustle and bustle of Fox Square, the performances were an unexpected sight in this busy crossroads.

Located at the intersection of Fulton Mall, a bustling shopping street, and Flatbush Avenue, a major thoroughfare, Fox Square is used every day by thousands of pedestrians and vehicular traffic yet it remains an ill considered and overlooked corner.

### this is the VARIABLE CITY.

Named after the 4,000 seat Fox Theater that was built on the site in 1929 by William Fox of 20th Century Fox, and demolished in 1970, the square's origins are all but forgotten and few refer to the square as more than the intersection of "Flatbush and Fulton," even though maps began identifying the square in 1931.

Both Brooklyn residents, Mandle and Krasnow were intrigued by Fox Square's misplaced identity and latent historical and cultural significance. VARIABLE CITY celebrates the cultural and social diversity of the site. It prompts a reexamination of the planning and design of the city and shows how art and culture impacts the built environment and is helping to reframe the programming and design of public space.



A photograph of a parade float at night. The float features a large, white, stylized figure, possibly a dancer or a character, with a dark, circular opening. The float is moving through a street, and a crowd of people is visible in the background, some looking towards the camera. The scene is illuminated by warm, yellowish light, likely from streetlights or the float's own lighting. The background shows a building with windows and architectural details.

the dancers in orange,

the building in front of you,



# street smart taking on the VARIABLE CITY

ZOË RYAN

For four weeks last fall, at lunchtime and at rush hour, shoppers, pedestrians, workers, and passersby had their passage through Fox Square, Brooklyn interrupted by a troupe of performers. The ties of the dancers' bright orange wrap tops swirled as they moved in groups or performed solo, disrupting the hustle and bustle with subtle choreographed moves that surprised onlookers. Developed by **Julia Mandle**, creative director of **J Mandle Performance** and **Ariel Krasnow**, an urban designer, with choreographer **Mark Jarecke**, **VARIABLE CITY: Fox Square** combines urban design techniques with performance art as experimentation into interdisciplinary approaches to examining public space and fostering new approaches to the planning and design of cities.

"In both academic training and professional work, the challenge to expand the scope of studies of cities beyond their physical and operational components has often been overlooked," explains Krasnow. "VARIABLE CITY is a step towards the integration of resources in consideration, delineation, development and use of space."

Fox Square's misplaced identity and latent historical and cultural significance (200 theaters were formerly located in the area) intrigued Mandle and Krasnow. Best described as a "lost" area, a term conceived of by Kevin Lynch in his landmark book *The Image of the City* (1960) to indicate places that have been forgotten or ignored, the site is no longer a destination or focal point. Today it is characterized as a barren thoroughfare and front yard to a Popeye's fast food outlet, which is located at its southernmost tip. However, VARIABLE CITY sets out to celebrate the cultural and social diversity of the site, and illustrate that it has the potential to be an active and inviting hub in downtown Brooklyn.

## BACKGROUND

Mandle works at a variety of scales, which she categorizes as "urban, architectural, interior and take home." To date, VARIABLE CITY has been her most ambitious outdoor project but it continues a thread of works inspired by particular spaces. Often the space is the generator for a performance, inspiring the subject of the work and the form of the choreography as well as its relationship to the audience. "Performance has a unique capacity to spark public curiosity in a way that is both disarming and engaging," she says. "With VARIABLE CITY, I was curious to see

"I was curious to see whether we could test a particular urban design assumption and engage the public in the site through performance." JULIA MANDLE.



KALCH: 1998 PHOTO: J MANDLE PERFORMANCE

whether we could test a particular urban design assumption and engage the public in the site through performance." Believing in the importance of chance encounters and the need to experience surprise happenings in everyday life, her performances often seem like spontaneous appropriations of the urban environment—there one day and gone the next. This was the case with **KALCH**, a performance she created in 1998, which traced the outline of the now buried Collect Pond, a five-acre natural pond that lay just north of what is now City Hall Park. In 1803, landfill was built over the site but a residue of its existence is marked by a small concrete park. **KALCH** is a term European settlers used to describe the mounds of oyster shells left near the pond by earlier Native American occupants of the site and also derives from "kalk," the Dutch word meaning chalk. The significance of the term was played out directly in the project. Eleven performers dressed head to foot in yellow costumes had wedges of yellow chalk strapped to their feet. As they followed the former perimeter line of Collect Pond their choreographed movements left a chalk line that extended over six city blocks. The hour-long performance, which took place every lunchtime for three days, engaged downtown workers and others in a rediscovery of the neighborhood and revealed its latent history.

Krasnow approaches her work as a Project Manager for **Progress of Peoples Development**, a non-profit housing corporation, based in Brooklyn (she was formerly Project Designer for the non-profit organization **Project for Public Spaces**), from an urban design background rooted in the dynamics of public space. However, she feels there is a wealth of information that can be brought to bear on the study of urban spaces that is not fully exploited by standard urban design studies, including how cultural forces can impact the condition of and public interpretation of the city.

## PRECEDENTS

Mandle and Krasnow's work together follows a lineage of investigations into the city undertaken by many artists and architects since World War II. They draw inspiration from a number of reference points, including the psychogeographic wanderings of the **Situationist International (SI)**. Led by Danish artist **Asger Jorn**, Italian artist **Giuseppe Pinot-Gallizio**, and French theorist **Guy Debord**, among others, the SI came together in 1957 to develop new methods of experiencing and documenting the city. One of these was the *dérive* or series of drifts through the urban environment. These directionless walks, undertaken over the course of a day by individuals or groups of SI members highlighted chance encounters and fresh discoveries of familiar places. They sought to reveal the hidden connections between spaces, both physical and non-physical, and to chart movement patterns based on their freewheeling walks. These psychological maps of the city were a counter to standard street maps. Designed to liberate the participants from their regular routines, the *dérive* was also intended to defamiliarize the city and foster new interpretations and mental representations of a place heightening awareness of an environment and daily habits.

**Their work picks up from where other artists such as Vito Acconci, in 1969, left off. ...he followed random strangers around the city until they disappeared into private places.**

A resonance can be found between their work and that carried out by Mandle and Krasnow who are also interested in chance encounters and discoveries and engage performance art as a tool to generate community feedback and prompt passersby to contemplate their environment. However, what makes their work unique is the incorporation of straightforward empirical research based on observing the urban fabric and public responses to on-site questionnaires. Unlike the Situationists who were looking to dismantle standard urban

design techniques, Mandle and Krasnow respect these methods but understand a need to combine and enhance them with alternative approaches to reading and analyzing the city in order to stimulate fresh readings and reactions to the city and provoke new methods of designing and planning the city. Their work picks up from where other artists such as **Vito Acconci**, in 1969, left off. In **Following Piece**, acted out over the course of 23 days, the artist followed random strangers around the city until they disappeared into private places. His documentation in the form of his writings and photographs reveals how people navigate the city and the relationships between the public and private zones.

## SHIFTING THE VARIABLES

Developed over a period of two years, **VARIABLE CITY** began with well-established urban design analysis, such as circulation, traffic, security and activity studies aimed at monitoring Fox Square and its physical condition. A questionnaire was also developed to obtain direct responses to the area from passersby. However, on a regular day prior to the performances, Krasnow explains that, "people were for the most part uninterested in discussing the issues of the site." In a typical planning process, at this point either a community meeting would be organized to generate debate from the local residents or a master plan for the area commissioned. However, what became evident to Krasnow and Mandle was that in order to begin thinking about complex design issues "we had to get people to take note of the site and be curious," asserts Mandle. Through their unique on-site approach that culminated in performance interventions on the square, **VARIABLE CITY** aimed at generating reactions and inspiring people about Fox Square, as a precursor to the next phase in the design process.

**"They were something out-of-the-ordinary. Their color was distinct and they were ceremonial in silhouette. However, a denim undergarment linked back to the everyday, so they didn't become too foreign."**

**JULIA MANDLE**

A series of roundtable discussions with practitioners in the field and other artists provided feedback on the initial investigations that Krasnow and her urban study team carried out. Mandle subsequently developed a number of performance proposals based on this research. These schemes were aimed at activating the square and prompting passersby to take note of their surroundings, their daily patterns of movement and the other people using the square. Jarecke developed choreography for these final concepts, which resulted in 104 performances acted out over four weeks by twelve dancers. At first performers were dressed in plain clothes and stood still in formations built around the architecture of the square. As the month progressed the performances became more complex. Costumes, designed by Mandle, were introduced in week two. The fluorescent orange wraps that enveloped the dancers were inspired by the industrial streetscape and the color of construction tape and police traffic cones. The costumes gave the dancers a strong presence and "functioned as a public attractor," Mandle explains. "They were something out-of-the-ordinary; their color was distinct and they were ceremonial in silhouette. However, a denim undergarment linked back to the everyday, so they didn't become too foreign."

## ACTING OUT

Also in week two, dancers went from still poses to traversing the triangle performing choreographed moves that were cued by the traffic lights and then eventually appropriated the entire area as a performance space, negotiating pedestrian crossings and dispersing into adjacent streets, alone or in groups. "In a small way we were imbedding the performance into the rhythms of Fox Square," states Jarecke. Harnessing street marketing tactics, 10,000 news-





UPWARD MOBILITY PERFORMED BY ALEX VILLAR IN LONDON PHOTO, COURTESY OF ALEX VILLAR  
 BOTTOM: TRYST PERFORMANCE IN LOWER MANHATTAN PHOTO: ARTHUR DONOWSKI



papers designed especially for the project were published and handed out for free during performances. They not only acted as a prop and program for the performances but contained information about the site and its future development potential. The difference in the public's response during the performances as opposed to prior to the performances was palpable. The performances piqued the public's interest. "During the performances, people came up to us with questions and were happy to respond to our questionnaires," says Krasnow. "It was rewarding to see people later on explain the project to others who were watching."

### VARIABLE CITY IN CONTEXT

A number of artists working today are interested in developing projects that address the urban realm. They include the Netherlands group **Social Fiction** and the UK-based collaboratives **Proboscis** and the **Space Hijackers** who organize group activities that question public space through projects dealing with cultural, creative, social and political issues. British collectives **Blast Theory**, **Furtherfield** and Paris-based **Karen O'Rourke** employ interactive media and telecommunications for their work and use these devices as a method of circulating their ideas to a broad audience. British-born, Paris-based artist **Lucy Orta** intervenes in public space with projects that are overtly political. For her ongoing conceptual project **Nexus Architecture/Collective Wear** she has made outfits that resemble boiler suits. A grid of these costumes can be connected at the waist by a detachable "umbilical cord" like tube of material that enables groups of people to gang together in public space during a parade or march. In addition, **Alex Villar's** work is decidedly risky but is particularly interesting as it challenges and documents city planning regulations. In 2002 he performed *Upward Mobility*. Climbing over bus stops, buildings, scaffolding and railings in London he sought to highlight the predetermined trajectory of our movements through the city.

### TAKING IT TO THE STREETS OF NEW YORK CITY

However, you do not have to go much further than your own front yard to look for ingenious interventions that similar to *VARIABLE CITY* disrupt daily patterns and unsettle normal routes through the city, sparking discovery and dialogue about the built environment.

### GLOWLAB

"This isn't an  
 artsy movement."  
 CHRISTINA RAY

Established by **Christina Ray**, **Glowlab**, a Brooklyn-based arts lab is especially interested in "encouraging people to notice more" and question what they observe in the everyday surroundings that shape daily life. For two years she has organized the **psy.geo.CONFLUX festival** with fellow artist David Mandl. An entirely volunteer-led initiative, the group are now seeking to expand the festival for 2005. "This isn't an artsy movement," asserts Ray. Rather, their premise is specifically about investigating what works in public space and what does not—from park benches to street layout.



The algorithmic walks that Ray has organized and projects such as “**Shuffle**,” in which participants meander the city following directions written on a deck of cards, are especially in tune with the Situationist International’s work and are also akin to the idea of the 19th century flaneur—a stroller who lets their curiosity lead him around the city on an intimate saunter through the streets, collecting impressions and observations as he goes. **NEWS.BOX.WALK**, her newest project is “a game whose prize is the pleasure of exploring the city as you never have before.” Participants navigate the city based on finding the colored new boxes and noting when and where they see them on a scorecard. Ray explains, “it keeps your awareness and attention on walking and what you find along the way.”

**D. JEAN HESTER**

Also as part of the psy.geo.CONFLUX festival held this year, Los Angeles-based artist **D. Jean Hester** hung posters and magic markers around the city and solicited answers to questions such as: “What would you change about this place?” The responses varied from the humorous to the obscene. But as Hester says, she is “interested in provoking real experiences and responses.”

**TRYST**

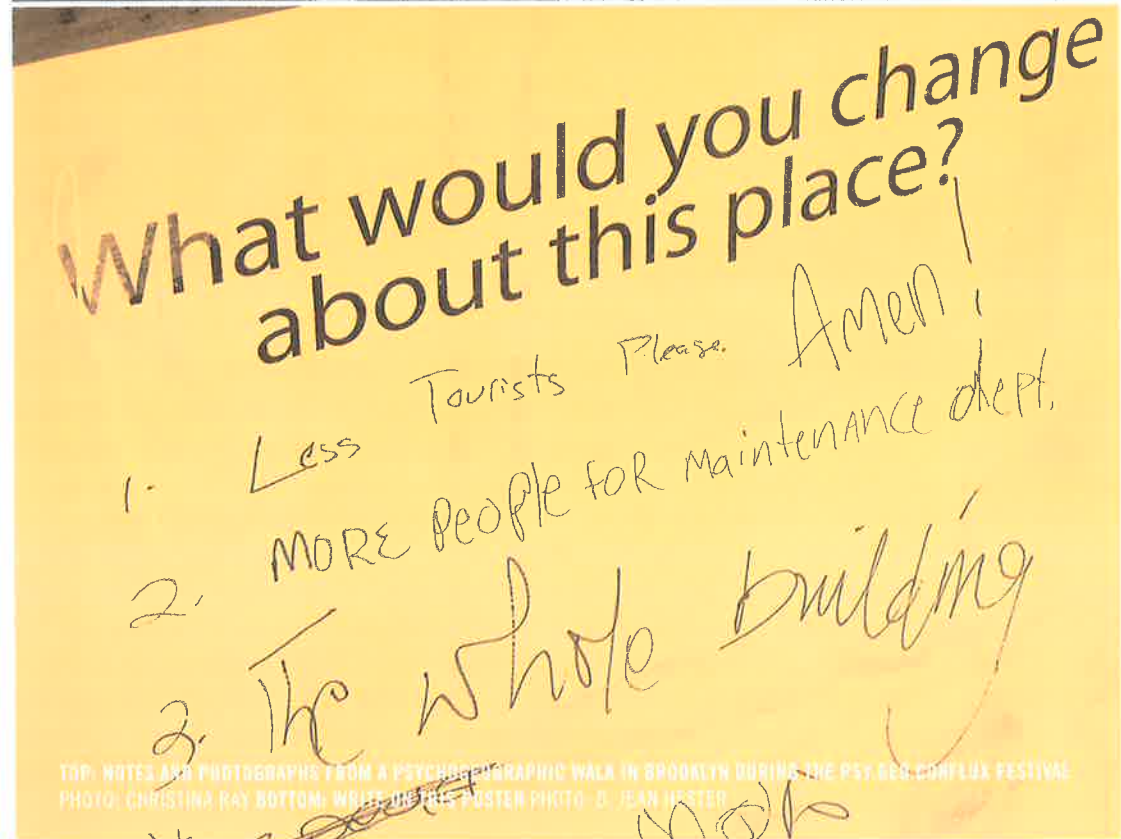
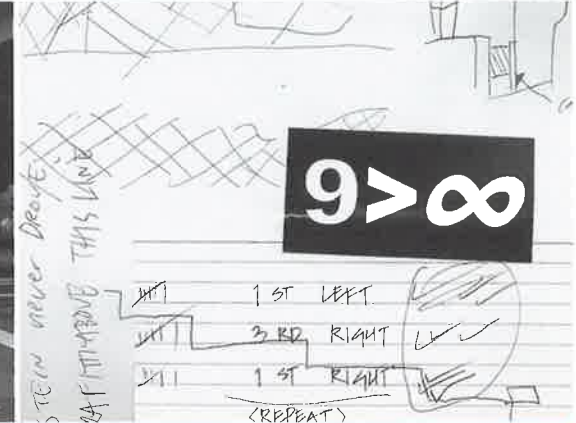
Their unusual work tends towards altering the atmosphere of a public space and “breathing life and humor into” ordinary places.

New York-based performers and choreographers, **Paul Benney**, **Clarinda Mac Low** and **Alejandra Martorell** state that their aim is to “nudge and jostle the preconceptions of residents, workers and tourists.” They also take inspiration from the Situationists and are similarly interested in the emotional as much as the physical consequences of the urban environment.

Their most recent project, **TRYST** was developed for the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council’s “**Sitelines**” summer performance program. It is an altruistic street performance with a purpose: helping people to cross the street. The three protagonists literally carried willing pedestrians from the corner of Water and Broad Street across a busy road of two-way traffic. When no one stepped forward for assistance they took turns to carry each other. Their unusual work tends towards altering the atmosphere of a public space and “breathing life and humor into” ordinary places.

**JANET CARDIFF**

Canadian-born artist Janet Cardiff is well known for her audio walks that have been produced for institutions around the globe as well as some public spaces. This year, in association with the Public Art Fund, she presents a new piece for Central Park, Her Long Black Hair. Visitors don headphones and listen to Cardiff’s rhythmic voice. “Walking is very calming. One step after another, one foot moving into the future and one in the past.”







TOP: NIGHTLIFE BY ANN CARLSON, 6TH AVENUE AT 23 STREET, NYC PHOTO: M. E. STROM  
GRAFFITI ART ON LOWER EAST SIDE, NYC BY SWOON PHOTO: SWOON



## SOUNDWALK

Similarly, **Soundwalk**, a grass roots-style organization based in Manhattan has been developing audio walking tours of some of New York City's most colorful neighborhoods including Time Square, Dumbo in Brooklyn and the Bronx. Their most recent, launched this fall to coincide with September 11, is the "**Ground Zero Sonic Memorial Soundwalk**," narrated by writer Paul Auster.

## ANN CARLSON

Intervening in the urban fabric has long been a temptation for artists from **Gordon Matta Clark** with his cut outs in abandoned industrial warehouses along the Hudson to **Keith Haring's** graffiti in the subways and on the streets of Lower Manhattan. Working today, artist **Ann Carlson's** installations are also meant to temporarily alter the dynamics of a place. Her human-scale dioramas based on old photographs of a particular site recall latent histories and reveal the multiple layers in the contemporary urban landscape. In 2000, she staged *Night Light* in Chelsea for which she created a diorama of an **Alice Austen** photograph taken in 1895. A newsgirl with papers dressed in period costume stood in front of an image of an elevated train that used to run along the avenue and a real striped awning that had once hung from the front of a shoe store that had inhabited the corner. Carlson explains that, "Amidst a lot of pedestrian activity the work has an eeriness and compelling abruptness, a moment of collision. I can conjure an examination of the present and the environment in which we live."

## SWOON

**Swoon**, a Brooklyn-based graffiti artist also responds to the environments in which she works, capturing intricate portraits of urban life. By wheat pasting her delicate woodblock prints on paper, that she then cuts into, on walls and vacant doorways in Brooklyn and downtown Manhattan, she is able "to create something that becomes a part of a specific environment and time," she states. "My work marks a certain period in the history of a place and then is gone. I am trying to open up the city by finding and creating new spaces. These types of direct guerilla democracy helps break down a lot of the isolation and alienation from your surroundings."

## LAST WORD

Mandle agrees, believing that "It is important to collide with someone else's point of view and discover your own world view is not the only one." What makes **VARIABLE CITY** particularly significant is the innovative collaboration between disciplines—bridging the gap between art and design and fostering reinterpretations of how we investigate the city. By testing the boundaries of their respective practices, Mandle and Krasnow provoked public engagement and curiosity and generated fresh readings of the city that neither urban design nor architectural or historical analysis could provide alone.



VARIABLE



NEWSPAPER

VARIABLE CITY PERFORMER AT FOX SQUARE, 2003 PHOTO: EMILY DRAZEN



# OCCUPIED SPACE

Ariel Krasnow, collaborating partner with Julia Mandle on *VARIABLE CITY*: Fox Square is an urban designer committed to exploring creative alternatives to the study of architecture and urban planning. Here she reflects on the key sources for her approach to this project, and how her experience has underscored the importance of striving to incorporate everything from daily life to art performances into her approach to urban design.

The character of a place is expressed through the activities of its inhabitant and the nature of the structures built to accommodate them. The dynamic between these two components, “the ephemeral” and “the solid,” are intimately bound and continuously in flux. The ephemeral agent is the people—how they use, interpret and transform the environment over time. The solid is the manmade landscapes they create and its means of construction. The play between the ephemeral and the solid is an often unrecognized potential in the shaping of space.

“The built environment comprises not only physical forms—buildings, streets, and infrastructure—but also the people acting on them. If built environment is an organism, it is so by virtue of human intervention: people imbue it with life and spirit of place.”  
**John Habraken**, *The Structure of the Ordinary*, MIT Press, 1998.

These perpetual transformations within the constructed world tell the story of our lived-in



“The happenings within spaces in the city... are as important, possibly more important than the built environment, the built demarcation of space.”

WARREN CHALK, “HOUSING AS A CONSUMER PRODUCT,” *ARENA*, 1966.

1966 WARREN CHALK  
“HOUSING AS A CONSUMER PRODUCT”

environment. The cumulative effect of what occurs creates a cultural landscape that layers the place, its use and the expressions of the resident population to become a reflection of that society.

People create many of the conditions that shape the man-made environment such as form of authority, historic legacies, artistic endeavors, societal values and economic capacity. These actions are in addition to regional circumstances of climate, materials and natural resources. Of the range of man-made landscapes, towns and cities are where, per square inch, the greatest number of people and the constructed forms they produce and inhabit are located. This accumulation of people produces more incidences of public displays and a higher frequency of spatial adaptation. Given the greater density of the urban configuration, it is where the maximum overlapping of personal and public spaces occur.

1966 WARREN CHALK  
“HOUSING AS A CONSUMER PRODUCT”



The United States has had an historic lack of concern for communally utilized public space. The idea of public space as a resource runs counter to the primary vision of individual ownership of space that has guided American ideology and land development policies. The rebirth of downtowns over the past 20 years has strengthened the attraction of a more densely built environment as a desirable alternative. In North American cities, government agencies and development pressures typically dictate the parameters of change possible to the larger scale physical environment. But alternatives to that cycle are also available. To utilize those options, the public, in addition to practitioners, must be knowledgeable, sensitive and motivated to exert their opinion.

Of the multiple agents of spatial change, *VARIABLE CITY* focused on the following determinants:

- The significance of perception; how people act, consciously or unconsciously, regarding existing conditions and the potential for change.
- The influence of the arts in developing an enlightened force for change; from neighborhood activists, to public agencies and design practitioners.

## PERCEPTIONS OF PLACE

Ten different people will view the same thing and describe it fifteen different ways. What people see, how they hear (smell, taste, feel) and how they react, are intimately entwined with personal, environmental and cultural factors.

Expectations and reactions to present environs are based on experience. As **John Berger**

wrote in his 1972 book, *Ways of Seeing*, “The way we see things is affected by what we know or what we believe.” Amid familiar surroundings the need to acknowledge immediate conditions is not essential, since within a stable environment we confidently anticipate a degree of consistency. But there are times when it is necessary to view the ordinary with a fresh eye or consider the commonplace differently.

At Fox Square in downtown Brooklyn, many people familiar with the area, admitted to having never thought about the location before, but were intrigued by the scope of *VARIABLE CITY*—an artistic endeavor and an exchange of information about a spot they had encountered hundreds of times in their daily routines. People with reference points outside of Brooklyn brought those insights to bear in responding to ideas for the future. Though many people suggested seating and trees, two Europeans envisioned a city “square”: a man from Switzerland described, “a fountain in the square with chairs and more greenery” and a woman from France commented that the space “would never be leftover in Europe, there would be a fountain, flowers and benches.” A woman from Guyana compared the negative aspects of the area to her native home saying, “It looks like Guyana, dirty and people sleeping in the street.” The majority of respondents were African American. One of them, a writer from Baltimore, reflected on how he wished the area reflected the complexity of African American culture.

The framework through which we view the world is also the basis for what we offer back to it. The writer, **Lucy R. Lippard**, describes the landscape in her 1998 book *The Lure of*



*the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society* as a narrative. “The story is composed of mythologies, histories, ideologies—the stuff of identity and representation.” Multiple accounts and past histories of daily life permeate the surroundings in which they unfold, but it may not be obvious to those within the local narrative that they are an essential part of the larger story. When confronted with a departure from the norm however, people are quick to acknowledge differences and may become more aware of how they relate to an altered environment. Change happens to us, or we can actively participate and contribute to the change. The relationship between the known and the new, between existing conditions and prospective aspirations, between the expected and the unforeseen, is about acknowledging what is there, what is different and what might be.

the needs of the people being served. Urban observers like **William H. Whyte** investigated how people act in public with a scientific rigor that uncovered many surprising patterns. The information he revealed has become invaluable in planning productive and dynamic public spaces. The premise of **VARIABLE CITY** is to survey the existing conditions of a place and based on those findings, test how temporary, aesthetic alterations might shift perceptions and generate new considerations for it. The immediate objectives were to impact the location while the broader goals are to affect the disciplines that will make those decisions. **VARIABLE CITY: Fox Square** is a prototype project in which downtown Brooklyn was selected as the initial location. The intention is that the project can be replicated at alternate sites.

Altering people’s perceptions can be a persuasive agent of change, particularly within a democracy. As more and more people perceive that an action, condition or a person has become either a positive force or a negative drawback to the current state, they can ideally act to voice opinion and to instigate change.

### ART AS A SPATIAL GENERATOR

The creative arts can occur under any condition, but a flourishing of the arts is often considered a barometer of social well-being and civic freedoms. Artistic endeavors and ideas that prevail throughout centuries can become defining characteristics of a civilization. At this moment of urban expansion worldwide there is an opportunity to embrace broader fields of inquiry and strengthen the links between urban development, architecture and, as in the case of this



VARIABLE CITY PERFORMANCE IN FOX SQUARE, 2008  
PHOTO: JOHN X. ORSOLA

“Public art participates in the production of meanings, uses, and forms for the city.”

ROSALYN DEUTSCHE, *EVICCTIONS: ART AND SPATIAL POLITICS*, MIT PRESS, 1998.

experiment, artistic enterprises. The arts have the ability to impact not only the aesthetics of a particular condition, but also the process of creating it.

Transformations to established modes will invariably occur; how actively and in what capacity people act will affect the course of those transformations. The movement of environmental, land and site-specific art has taken up the issue of altering the landscape to entice people into viewing their surroundings (and the art) differently. The cumulative effect of public art, from street level guerrilla arts to independent artists working in the public realm and private or government initiated public art projects is a positive influence overall on the general public’s awareness and appreciation of both space and art.

Performance art is a transitory alteration to an existing site with the capacity to inhabit

space quickly and in a big way. It is an instantaneous layer of inhabitation. But unlike a block party, a street fair or even a blanket of snow—events that also briefly transform space—performance and other temporary public art forms embrace the possibility of the astonishing, the unusual and the ingenious. They are more likely to transmit purposeful intent and challenge the bounds of accepted wisdom.

“The newly acknowledged reciprocity between artwork and site changed the identity of each, blurring the boundaries between them, and paved the way for art’s participation in wider cultural and social practices.” **Rosalyn Deutsche**, *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics*, MIT Press, 1998.

**VARIABLE CITY**, as part of that effort, is also trying to broaden the initiative of direct collaboration between the public, the arts and the planning process. The urban planning process, which has shifted away from a post-war technocratic assault on the environment, desperately needs to continue widening its doors to incorporate multiple viewpoints. There has been a change in attitude over the past decade (most notably the inclusion of landscape design), which is creating a more holistic design environment. In New York City, the redevelopment of the World Trade Center site (despite the political minefields) has had a huge impact on garnering public response and striving to integrate a publicly reviewed aesthetic component into the planning scheme.

While not all artistic endeavors in the public realm seek to affect public opinion for social or political purposes, some are explicit in their goal. The **Obey** campaign consists of



CHILD HOLDING UP FENCE IN NEW BRUNSWICK

City planners, urban designers and architects vie with other powerful non-form-making forces to anticipate and influence physical and functional changes to the built environment. They are in a unique position to have a disproportionately large effect on the transformations of physical space. At the same time, their work must be grounded in



publicly placed stickers bearing the French wrestler Andre the Giant's silhouetted face. The project is eloquently described by its creator **Shephard Fairey**. "The first aim of Phenomenology is to reawaken a sense of wonder about one's environment. The Obey campaign attempts to stimulate curiosity and bring people to question both the campaign and their relationship with their surroundings."

ever-ambiguous concept of "public." Implicit, in the description above of "occupied space" is that multiple individual articulations give rise to a kind of collective cultural rendering. The multitudes of incidences that occur transcend standard divisions of "public" and "private" by appropriating space in both visible and implied ways. The famous **NoIli** plan of Rome favored the public street over building delineations, blurring the distinctions of inside and outside, public and private. **VARIABLE CITY's** working title was "Pedestrian Traces" in which we hoped to map not just observable paths, activities and perceptions of people, but something of their presence, real and intangible. If we were to map the imprint left by people across three dimensions, including time, the configuration of public space might look quite different from its assumed demarcations. **VARIABLE CITY's** unexpected moments of art attempted to harness some of that unknown by engaging people to perceive things a little differently, and imagine. If those responses can help to galvanize ideas for the future, then this first phase of the project will have been successful. The next step is to reactivate the site again through a performance intervention based on the findings of this first phase. In theory, the development process of **VARIABLE CITY** is a prototype to be applied at other sites here and in other cities. The goal of this method is to make another step towards the integration of resources in the description, delineation, development and use of space. Potentially, the more a population is aware of its environment, the more it will strive to influence that space as an expression of its needs and aesthetics.



OBEY CAMPAIGN, NEW YORK PHOTO: ARIEL KRASNOW

Another example of a subtle unexpected adjustment to the landscape is the project "Flirting with Boundaries" by **Kirsten Kucer**. The artist wrapped one hundred multicolored skirts around trees that straddled adjacent but physically and socially distinct neighborhoods on either side of Church Avenue in Brooklyn. Her hope was to encourage perceptual and social links that "would induce neighbors...to stop and talk together."

Whether intended or not, displays of public art have the capacity to reconfigure the normal, if only for a moment. They make people stop and wonder, ignore or reconsider their experience and relationship to the surroundings. Underlying the themes addressed here, of raising awareness of public spaces and the potential for the arts to contribute to its form and intent, is the

We built into the dance a timing system that was cued by the traffic lights. In a small way we were imbedding the performance into the rhythms of Fox Square.

**MARK JARECKE,  
CHOREOGRAPHER**

In both academic training and professional work, the challenge to expand the scope of the study of cities beyond its physical and operational components is often overlooked in favor of architectural design. **VARIABLE CITY** offered the opportunity to expand the standard analyses of existing conditions and observations.

**ARIEL KRASNOW,  
URBAN DESIGNER**

A woman remembered her father taking her to the Fox Theater for her birthday and how glamorous the area was then, "When we'd come here to go shopping we'd dress up. This was the place."

**BETH DISHARON,  
VARIABLE CITY DANCER**

Performance art has a unique capacity to spark public curiosity, in a way that is both disarming and engaging. I wanted to explore whether performance could uniquely engage the public's interest in the site to test an urban design assumption.

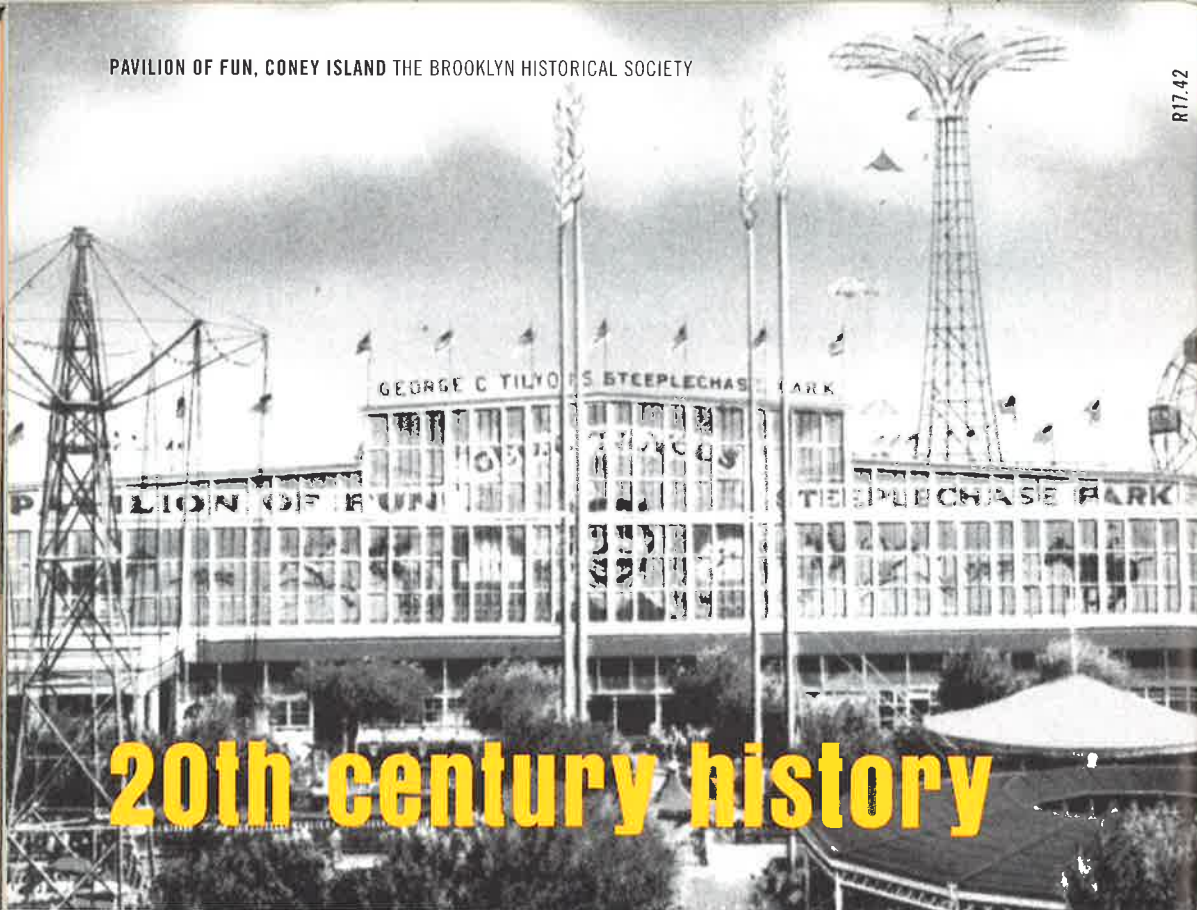
**JULIA MANDLE,  
J MANDLE PERFORMANCE**

Fox Square could be a place to stop, but it's not.

**PASSERBY,  
FOX SQUARE**

# VARIABLE OPINIONS





# 20th century history

**ELIZABETH STOEL.** ELIZABETH STOEL, 2004 HARVARD GSD COMMUNITY FELLOW, VAN ALLEN INSTITUTE

From its etymological origins, we understand the pavilion as the butterfly of building types: light, delicate, wondrous, and often the site of pleasure. Whether temporary or permanent, pavilions have accommodated a myriad of functions, among them bathing, dancing, eating and drinking, sporting, relaxing, and exhibition-viewing. Beyond their many uses, pavilions frequently display structural and aesthetic innovation in close concert with nature.

Pavilions range in scale as well as purpose, from one-room, open-air wood constructions like the rustic pavilions of Central Park, to enormous technological masterpieces such as Buckminster Fuller's geodesic dome for the 1967 Montreal Expo. Recent works like NOX's Sweetwater Pavilion of 1997, one of the earliest examples of built digital design, and Shigeru Ban's Japanese Pavilion for the 2000 Hannover Expo, an incredible latticework of paper tubes, continue to broaden the spectrum of possibility.

Considering New York in the last century, a lost pavilion comes to mind, the aptly named Pavilion of Fun at Steeplechase Park in Coney Island, demolished in 1966. Brainchild of early 20th-century entertainment magnate George C. Tilyou, the Pavilion of Fun was completed in 1908. A grand Beaux-Arts-style construction, impervious to fire and weather and enclosing some 2.8 acres of amusements, it was one of the first steel structures of its kind and size in the US. As Charles Denson wrote in *Coney Island Lost and Found* (2002): "The architecture of the Pavilion of Fun at Steeplechase was alive and visceral...As my eye traveled from ground to roof, I soared." At the opening of the Pavilion of Fun, the entertainment included the Blow-Hole Theater, where spectators might be chased by clowns or have their skirts blown above their heads by hidden air-jets, and rides like the Human Pool Table, in which participants were thrown together as they attempted to cross a floor of rotating discs. All around the Pavilion's rides and games were concessions and spectator platforms. The Pavilion was physically intertwined with the grounds outside, encircled by a mechanical horse race that ended at the Pavilion's entrance.

What lessons for the 21st century can we take from the Pavilion of Fun? The mix of formal and informal amusements provided possibilities for countless different kinds of recreation. Like Cedric Price's unbuilt Fun Palace of 1961, in which the public could assemble their own temporary environments, it allowed users to appropriate its architecture for their own enjoyment. The pavilions of the future, too—whether oversized palaces like Tilyou's Pavilion or far more modestly scaled—could be spaces that only loosely dictate program, as open to choice and change as they are to the environment around them.

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