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VAN ALEN ² REPORT

Focus: Real Downtown/Virtual Downtown Project in Public Architecture

FALL PROGRAM SCHEDULE 1996

HEALTH & THE CITY

IN RECOVERY: PUBLIC HEALTH/PUBLIC SPACE & DESIGN SEMINAR SEPTEMBER 18: FORUM # 1:

"School Space/Breathing Space — Redesign & Renewal"

Speaker: Claire Barnett, Director New York Healthy Schools Project +
Asher Derman, Green October

Time/Place: 6:30 - 8:30 pm, Wednesday, VAI, 30 West 22 Street

OCTOBER 9: FORUM # 2:

"Is Defensible Space Defensible?: The Public Realm and
Community Control"

Speakers: Zane Yost, architect +
Michael Conard, NYC Housing Authority

Time/Place: 6:30-8:30 pm, Wednesday, VAI, 30 West 22 Street

NOVEMBER 13: EXHIBIT/FORUM #3:

Environmental Justice & the Design Professions

Speakers: Rachel Godsil, Attorney, NAACP Legal Defense &
Educational Fund Inc. + tba

Time/Place: Opening — 6:00-7:00 pm;

Forum: 7:00 - 8:30 pm, Wednesday, VAI, 30 West 22 Street

PUBLIC-PRIVATE PROPERTY

SEPTEMBER 25: PUBLIC VIEWING - THE HARBOR PROJECT WEBSITE

Presentation and discussion by site designers and decision-makers on the future of
New York's harbor and waterfront as a public realm.

Time/Place: 7:00 pm, Wednesday, VAI, 30 West 22 Street

OCTOBER 1996: GOVERNORS ISLAND JURY REPORT AVAILABLE

DECEMBER 11: THE HARBOR IS A PUBLIC REALM FORUM

Speakers: to be announced

Time/Place: 6:30-8:30 pm, Wednesday; Tishman Auditorium,
The New School, 66 West 12 Street

CONTACT US FOR RESERVATIONS/NEW INFORMATION

1996 PARIS PRIZE COMPETITION

CULTURAL INFORMATION EXCHANGE:

A temporary structure *in* Wall Street

In response to the ongoing transformation of Wall Street from a "9 to 5" to a "24-hour" community, the competition calls for the design of a strategic, temporary "cultural exchange," as critical to the renewal of the district as the "stock exchange" was to its invention. The competition sites this proposal on public property, on a trapezoid at the end of Wall Street now used for parking, with preliminary plans to be redesigned as open space. In recognition of the evolving community of Downtown and the nature of an exchange, the brief calls for a structure that is low-rise, temporary, and at the same time gives a public, physical, and architectural presence to the "virtual" public realm that is transforming Wall Street, Downtown, and downtowns around the world.

Jurors: Jacques Herzog, Toshiko Mori + tba

Prize amounts: First Prize \$8,000, Second Prize \$4,000, and Third Prize \$2,000.

To Enter: Open to recent and prospective graduates of architecture degree programs offered in the United States (1988-1997). Packets are available now (information is also available at <http://www.vanalen.org>) and are **due January 31, 1997**. The competition will be judged in February 1997 and the winners will be announced at a **public opening exhibit/forum** of the entries in late February.

VAN ALLEN INSTITUTE

Van Alen Institute: Projects in Public Architecture was founded as the Society of Beaux-Arts Architects in 1894. The organization was led for decades by architects who played a decisive role in shaping New York's and the nation's public realm including William Van Alen, architect of the Chrysler Building.

In 1995, the Institute reoriented itself to make a more direct response to the crisis for today's cities — the continuing decline of the physical public realm. Reconnecting to New York as the Institute's primary site for investigating the future of architecture and urbanism, the organization chose the name Van Alen Institute: Projects in Public Architecture to represent and identify the new mission and honor the organization's most significant benefactor.

Membership: Benefits include announcements of upcoming design competitions, invitations to seminars, exhibition openings and public events. Members receive *Van Alen Reports* on ongoing projects.

— **Associate Member \$25.** Students, recent graduates (May 1992 to present), and those more than 100 miles from New York City.

— **Member \$50.**

— **Contributor \$75 and above.**

— **Benefactor \$500 and above.**

Van Alen Institute is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, contributions over \$50 are tax-deductible.

VAN ALEN REPORT

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DEFINITION

The Real Downtown/Virtual Downtown project began with a thesis: the invention of a new, virtual public realm on the internet should strengthen rather than diminish the physical public realm. In New York, the recognition of a "new media" district called "Silicon Alley" in Manhattan south of 42nd Street seems to confirm this thesis: upstairs, there are businesses driven by the interactive *virtual* public realm of the internet, while down on the streets is a thriving interactive *real* public realm, with all the access, variety, and range available on-line on-screen upstairs.

The project is testing that thesis, from the **Public Viewing in the Flatiron** project last winter, to the 1996 **Future of Work and Future of Downtown Forums**, to the ongoing **Paris Prize: Cultural Information Exchange: A Temporary Structure in Wall Street** design competition.

This report focuses on the forums, which place the changes Downtown in the context of the larger issues of the changing character of work, leisure, and the public realm.

FUTURE OF WORK FORUM

Speakers: **Janet Abrams**, culture and design critic; **Jay Chiat**, instigator of the Chiat-Day "virtual offices" in New York and Los Angeles; **Mitchell Moss**, Director of the Taub Urban Research Center, New York University; **Gaetano Pesce**, architect of the New York Chiat-Day office; **Patricia Sachs**, anthropologist and technical director rethinking work for NYNEX.

Mitchell Moss stated the problem as: "What is the structure of work today in cities, where does it occur in cities, what can we do about it to make sure it continues to occur?" He answered: self-employment will grow, it is happening in Downtown, and the city should respond to the fact that the self-employed operate on a different schedule and in a different physical pattern than ever before.

New York is well-equipped for this change, since many areas already have "24-hour" services, and many districts have successfully converted old buildings to new uses. But Downtown New York continues to face challenges. Many office buildings will not convert: "some of the buildings that they thought in 1960 were important are totally obsolete. We have not yet come to grips with the demolition of bad office buildings."

Other buildings could be converted but zoning is a hindrance. "The cities which are going to flourish are the cities that attract people who will be able to live and work within close proximity. We have been able to make living and working synergistic as opposed to being antagonistic," and the city's zoning needs to change to accommodate it further: "if New York is going to survive it is going to have to understand that [zoning] policies designed for another era are going to have to be challenged quickly."

Jay Chiat: At the beginning of the '90s, Chiat thought about how he "actually worked," noting that: "my typical day would be that I would go into the office and I would plug into our own network, and I would look at my messages. I would then respond to those messages that I could on e-mail and I would return the phone calls that came up. Then I would leave my office...and my office remained empty. It wasn't really an efficient way to use the space. As I started to investigate it some more by opening my file drawer I found that the last piece of relevant information was dated March of '86...everyone else had even more obsolete material in their drawers." He decided to make "the office a resource instead of just a space to store stuff."

His office's main way of working was meetings. "Now if you think about it, if you eliminate all the private space taken up by offices, you have a lot of room for meetings." Without private offices, they turned to the university model, where "nobody has an office except the professors. You come in, you listen to a lecture, you get an assignment, and you are

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PUBLIC SPEAKING

supposed to do your work...If you have a test or a quiz you study someplace like in a library or at home." Today, "everyone gets a cellphone when they come in, nothing is wired. You also get regular mail because we can't seem to convince anyone else not to send you regular junk. You plug in and your name gets registered on the computer" and you go work at a variety of "thinking fountains" and stations, or meet in the project rooms.

Gaetano Pesce: His basic philosophy of designing for work: "We are entering a period where no homogeneity will be the characteristic. The future will be made by minorities. But not the minorities we are used to...We are going into a time where someone is part of a minority for a short period of time because his or her way of thinking brings them together and then more information pushes that mind or that person to move from that minority and go to another one. This is the atomic time. We move like atoms and this is the story."

"Maybe an office in the future is not an office. It is a place where I go because at a separate moment in my life I am interested in red. So I go and find people who are interested in red. I know that there is a red club so I go and I sit in a comfortable chair and have a drink. I wait for someone to come and share information and affinities. I am there because I look for affinities and things to share to help myself. This is the club which in the old time was called office and this is what the office of the future will be."

Patricia Sachs: "What on earth is an anthropologist doing at a phone company? This phone company is a hundred year-old monopoly trying in some ways to break itself up and trying not to in other ways. It is populated by a long history of phone families who have many generations in the business. Working inside a large organization for many generations has a way of imbedding the way things get done in a fairly comfortable wellworn way. So trying to shift practice is tricky."

"So my group at NYNEX tries to take a look at the design and reorganization of work, in contrast to 'reengineering' work which is very task- and process-oriented. We try to take a look at the practices. Rather than have external consultants, we work with workers themselves, who have an understanding of the patterns of their own labor. So they help construct ways of actually getting the work done."

This is work beyond the office, "telecommunications out on the streets, underground, in the basements, on the phone pools, as well as in the offices in order to create an environment which is really a work system environment, not a physical environment."

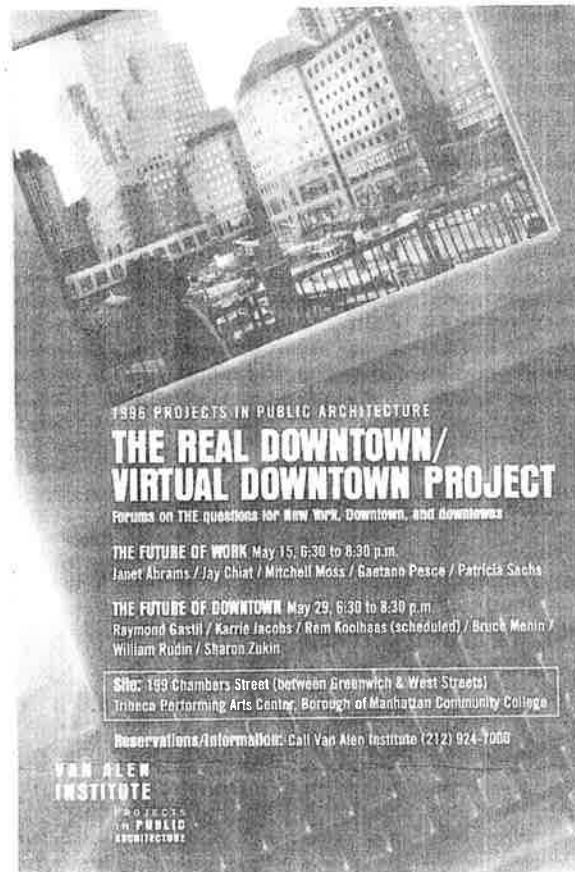
Discussion

Zoning

Asked how zoning could accommodate a live-work lifestyle, **Moss** responded: "The entire area below Chambers Street should be reconsidered. There is no reason why in a society where households are becoming increasingly fragmented that people who are unrelated shouldn't be able to have dormitory arrangements or other configurations so that we could allow New York to get many, many young people to live here without having to pay high rents...Just as we have workplaces with no offices, we should allow...post-college dorms." **Moss** continued: "We should also take some of our tax policies like the unincorporated income tax, which is an anti self-employment tax, and eliminate it in the areas where there are the highest vacancies. Lower Manhattan has a genuine problem. It is about 1% of the land mass, it used to be 8% of the property tax base, it is going down to 6%, it may go down further. I think it wouldn't be the worst thing in the world to try a prototype. Take on a small area, 1% of the city and see if you could reconsider zoning as a tool for the regeneration of activities."



(continued inside)



Internetworking

Abrams challenged Chiat: "Do you think that on-line activity, in which you cannot detect as easily what is editorial and what is supporting it commercially...will change the business itself?" **Chiat** responded "you'll detect it. People are not silly. The internet is a medium. No one has figured out how to make any real money on it except through the stock market — creating an internet company and then going public. [But] it is going to be an important medium and it is going to shift. As soon as you get comfortable with the fact that you can give your credit card number [on-line], you will be able to shop and order a custom-made suit or a dress on the internet."

Chiat speculated on the ramifications for public space and public safety: "There is a big decline in malls across the United States because they are unsafe. The reason malls were created was so that you would be safe when you were shopping, now that is turning around" as the internet becomes the "safe place" to shop.

Environments that Work for Work

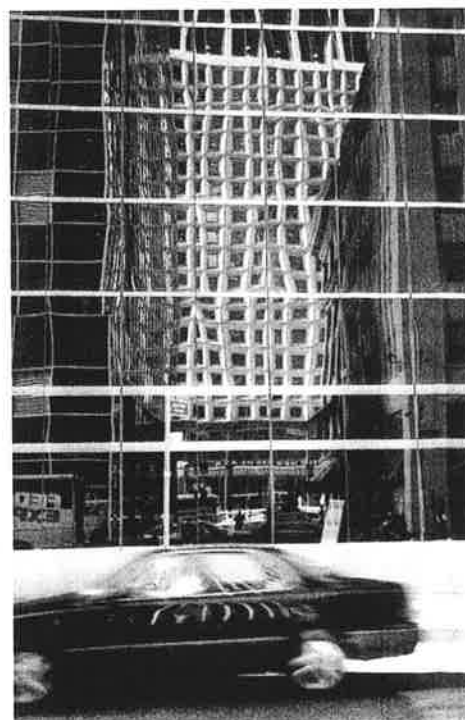
Abrams asked, what is it that makes an environment encourage work? **Sachs** responded that at Chiat-Day (now TBWA/Chiat-Day), there is more than the "explosive vividness and color. You have social practices alongside it — if you finish the work, you can do the work where you want, you can go home or to the park. You are not tied into a way of working, a place of working and so on. That is just as significant as the physical space."

Is live-work what we want?

There were challenges to the idea that working at home was liberating: To the panel: "The university model includes a sense of communal thinking and research...I can't tell you what a bummer it is to leave the office and go out into the urban maelstrom and get some big color print done at Kinko's. Just because we can break down the office, is that a door we want to go through?" **Pesce** responded: "I think as soon as you create something autonomous it is wrong. Because you give everything you need to someone in the same space and life is poorer this way. So I don't think the solution is working at home."

Is this discussion relevant to non-creative, non-professional work?

"What happens to those things like the back office check processing department or the insurance claims department?" **Sachs** responded: "One of the surprises that I have found, — and I have done research work in the stockroom of a factory, on a production floor and at the phone company — is that what we imagine is unproblematic, thoughtless work usually isn't quite so unproblematic. We assume that manual labor does not have a whole lot of intellectual work going on in it and that is not always true. Where I have seen people who have to do work that is mundane and dull they are usually quite eager to get out of it and to transform it in some way."



FUTURE OF DOWNTOWN FORUM

Speakers: **Karrie Jacobs**, writer on the politics of design and the culture of technology; **Bruce Menin**, developer, lawyer, converting two downtown buildings from office to residential; **William Rudin**, developer of the the Information Technology Center; **Sharon Zukin**, professor of sociology at CUNY Graduate Center and Brooklyn College, **Raymond Gastil**, moderator, Van Alen Institute.

Bruce Menin: "Part of creating urban gentrification and new revivals in cities involves...the 'self-fulfilling concept' program of marketing. My vision is one that requires that two things happen — that I be able to provide lifestyle and value...I want people to live in a pre-war style, architecturally significant and unique building and I want to do that at a price which is affordable. That's what brings urban pioneers to projects."

"One of the keys to success in a gentrifying area is critical mass," which Broad Street has because of the Information Technology Center at 55 Broad as well as "the intersection with Wall Street, and nearby Stone Street, a low-rise historic street." Participating in the Alliance for Downtown's Streetscape project, Menin noted that: "we have convinced them that Broad Street needs to be fixed up, cleaned up. The idea here is to create a West Broadway, an Ocean Drive, with a New York flavor."

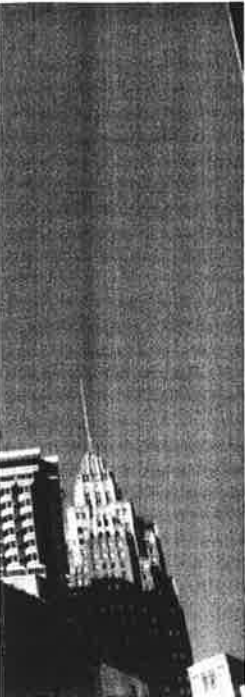
Menin articulated how he is able to successfully convert 25 Broad Street from offices to apartments, noting the lobby's 24-hour business center, apartment floors able to support laundries & storage, as well as floor plans that accommodate live-work arrangements.

William Rudin: When they got the call that Drexel, Burnham, Lambert, their company's prime tenant for 55 Broad Street, was going out of business, "we knew that Lower Manhattan was going to be headed for some serious problems." Their "building happened to be full of asbestos, the mechanical systems were antiquated and to reposition it we knew we had to spend millions of dollars." In 1990, they had no reason to try. "It took us five years to get the political establishment to realize that Lower Manhattan, the third largest business district in the country, was in serious jeopardy." With private groups and the city, they found a way to change this. The Mayor's downtown plan came in December of 1994. "All of 1995 we negotiated with the City Council, the State Assembly, with the State Senate and got the plan [which encourages redevelopment downtown through tax incentives] signed in October of 1995."

With the plan underway, Rudin moved forward with creating the Information Technology Center out of the shell of 55 Broad. A consortium of businesses and institutions "asked the new media industry what they needed to expand and grow in New York City." They came back with four simple precepts: low cost flexible space, advanced telecommunications technology, 24-hour access with 24-hour air conditioning, and a community environment. In response, the ITC has financial incentives tied to the 1995 plan: tenants can take 50% off real estate and commercial rent taxes and receive Con Edison energy rebates up to 50%. The building is designed "on Vice President Gore's philosophy of an open platform." They "took out all the mechanical systems and put in individual floor units. We put in seven separate telecommunication systems so that tenants have maximum flexibility." And a "key element is a local area network within the building. That helps the community environment we are trying to create. The concept is to create a totally wired urban village in Lower Manhattan."

Sharon Zukin: "I hope to be the one on the panel who injects some realism and common sense into these wonderfully visionary presentations. Usually it is the sociologist who makes the wonderfully visionary presentation and the developers or others who inject the common sense. I see that there is both good news and bad news for people who like myself are often critical of urban developments. The good news is that we have lots of empty space to refashion. The bad news is that there is no social planning mechanism to decide what to do with the space as a whole."





She continued: "I am somewhat taken aback by the discrete charm of the bourgeoisie that oozes from the images of Lower Manhattan...[and] dismayed at the possibility that Lower Manhattan may be remade like any other place." Zukin observed that Tribeca and its arts activity now give Lower Manhattan an identity, but there is little in reinvented Downtown to sustain that identity. "Other areas, Soho and Tribeca, have grown by accretion. People have fixed up their space themselves. Those agglomeration economies grew by affinity rather than by conscious marketing."

Zukin asked whether the area's new "public spaces will encourage all New Yorkers to come to this area and use it." For instance, she "would like to see a branch of the Science and Technology Library." Rudin interjected: "Our building will have a connection to that library," and Zukin replied: "connected is not always the same as being spatially there. The communication might be great within the building, the communication might be great within the LAN (local area network), but a building like that, as great as it might be, becomes a gated community."

Karrie Jacobs organized her talk around "The Emptiness," the phenomenon of "an urban environment largely disowned by the environment that created it." To Jacobs, Wall Street and its office buildings have that emptiness "albeit not at lunch time." She presented how we got there. "A few years ago, people were still talking about the electronic super-highway." Overused or not, the term "was quite apt." She continued: "The real highways siphoned the middle class out of America's cities and into the suburbs...Likewise, electronic technology, by shunting tasks that we ordinarily do in the real world...into electronic space, again siphons activities and people away from cities."

Jacobs added that "Lower Manhattan suffers from a case of 'The Emptiness' because Wall Street is the original virtual reality business...The stock market and financial market in general have always been about the exchange of pure information. Meaning that changes in the way information is organized and moved affected those industries early — leaving Lower Manhattan more susceptible." Jobs lost and not replaced since the stock market crash of 1987 have been superseded by "computers talking on the telephone to other computers," machines that don't "need to be anywhere near the financial district."

The Information Technology Center, only recently a prime example of "The Emptiness" is one paradox for Jacobs: once again, "the newest technology is supposed to fix the problems of the older technology." A second paradox is the apparent goal to "fix" the cultural context for that new technology: "the city is trying to turn the financial center into a vibrant 24-hour neighborhood, to zone 'hipness,' which raises the question: can hipness be grown by the government as fertility doctors grow embryos in the lab?"

Jacobs reported that Joe Rose, Director of City Planning, admitted that "we can't legislate hipness but we can take away the impediments to development." She concluded: "What we wind up with is sort of a Zen approach to urban renewal. By undoing existing zoning, by allowing a neighborhood to just be what it will with a little publicity and financial incentives, it might grow into a prototypical 21st century neighborhood."

Discussion

Planning & 'Hipness'

Menin challenged Zukin's attitude towards planning as inconsistent. "You seemed sort of enamored with the organic, fix-it-up quality of Soho...yet you want to see some sort of fixed planning process [for Lower Manhattan]." Re: hipness and the bourgeoisie: "I don't know that hip is the right word. I think what Bill [Rudin] is doing is exciting, I think our project isn't necessarily bourgeois at all...when I use comparisons to uptown, I do it only to illustrate something, not because it is in any



way a replication. The apartments are much bigger...they are cheaper." At the same time, "Wall Street is bourgeois, let's not kid ourselves. I think it [Lower Manhattan] is going to ultimately fuse its own identity."

He added: "The bottom line is people have to work, live and eat. I have to give them a place to live. I can make it marginally different and marginally better and I can hope it will attract them. Bill [Rudin] can do the same with his concept and so can Tony [Goldman, a developer involved with restaurant and related projects downtown] but nobody needs to plan that. We are all reasonably good at our subspecialties, it will happen organically."

Jacobs added: "What is healthiest about what is going on Downtown is the lack of planning. No one has come along with a master plan and said "OK we are going to bulldoze this and put in X number of buildings here and this is what is going to save this neighborhood." But can you "base an economy in a neighborhood or in a city on these new multi-media companies," even if they are "every bit as hip as the artists of the 1960's and 70's? What happens next week?" Rudin responded "the companies we are dealing with are 1000 square feet today and they are either 10,000 square feet tomorrow or they are out of business. So if one company goes, there is a client at the other end of the floor that is growing."

Schools & the 24-hour community

Rudin noted that schools are part of the "24-hour" equation: "I think the top priority of the Alliance and the residential developers is making sure that the school that is budgeted will get the go ahead. That in Battery Park City a K-12 school gets built. To the panel: "Have you looked at adaptive reuse of buildings for schools?" Rudin replied: "we have 25 million square feet of space...I think we can find 100,000 feet for a school" although the priority is still the new school.

Why not a Historic District?

The panel was asked why the real estate community and the Alliance were opposed to a historic district for Lower Manhattan. Rudin responded: "the fear is that if you just do a blanket historic district, it will be a tremendous impediment to attracting capital...And these [historically significant] buildings are not going to be torn down." Jacobs interjected "not now, but in 10 years it will be possible." Menin added that tearing down buildings isn't the only issue: "I think the fear is that people don't do the right things with the facades of their buildings...if we all don't cooperate together to make sure the buildings are properly lit and properly treated it can ruin a street. The key thing is if [a historic district] doesn't happen the community needs to apply pressure on all the developers to ensure that they do the right thing. The politics are such that we will have to rely on these pressures."

A longer, edited transcript is available to members of Van Alen Institute.



VAN ALEN 2 REPORT