

HEALTH & THE CITY

VAN ALEN INSTITUTE PROJECTS IN PUBLIC ARCHITECTURE:

As a design think tank, advocate, and clearing house of ideas for improving the public realm, Van Alen Institute has a responsibility to look at the public realm as it is even as we envision what it could be.

It is not the Institute's mission to overprivilege the "urban" public realm, even if we could define what urban is in a world where Las Vegas is a city. But the Health and the City Project in Public Architecture does begin with a conventional urban site, New York City, for several reasons. First, because it is the American city where the most people spend the most time in locations that are by definition public, and where the most people are most dependent on the public realm's infrastructure even when they are in their discrete private element.

On the one hand, there is the ultimate public space of the sidewalk, where by definition if not experience everyone has a right to be, and on the other there are public schools, hospitals, workplaces, and housing, architecture constructed by and for the public, but not for all the public all the time. And then there are the hybrids such as Riverfront State Park, a public superstructure where everyone can go atop a public infrastructure, a sewage treatment plant with restricted access.

For the urban public realm, it is these hybrids that seem to generate both the most frustration and the most opportunity--and Van Alen Institute believes, an important arena for design thinking and action. Senior housing is proposed next to the city bus depot; hundreds of millions in HUD money is proposed for housing on Brownfields (abandoned, formerly industrial sites, often with some toxic contamination); a decayed waterfront infrastructure of piers is crumbling because the water is cleaner; an obsolete military base tries to open itself to public access; a city school is proposed as "green" not only for the health of its students and staff, but as a demonstration to the wider community.

What is the role of architecture, planning, and design in this? The totalizing visions of architects like Le Corbusier often assumed a fantastical notion of health and the city (although yielding wonderful hybrids such as the roof top gym at the Marseilles Unité.) And architecture's long record of contributing to disciplinary regimes of health puts into question its motives and effect. Yet shouldn't health be integral to the rethinking and redesign of the public realm? Can't the designers and makers of the public realm have an image of urban health that surpasses that of Olmsted? Rather than carp that Olmsted's vision of "green lungs for the city" is outdated, can't we find our own currency?

This fall's "In Recovery" series, encapsulated in this report, works to answer those questions. First, it began with an expansive notion of the relationship between health and the public realm, ranging from environmental toxins in schools to defensible space in housing, to an urban open space system founded on principles of environmental justice.

Van Alen Report 3 focuses on the issues of Health & the City, but it also reflects the experience of the past year since the project was announced. The two other key project areas, the New York Waterfront and Real Downtown/Virtual Downtown, are crossing over in ways we didn't anticipate. The urban waterfront enters an ecological discourse, a skyscraper covered in signage becomes less about its "virtual" cladding than about the "health" of its environmental systems. For the coming summer and fall, the Institute will work to maintain its focus and at the same time recognize the inevitable relationships between projects, the hybrid strengths of the public realm.

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REPORT

IN RECOVERY FORUM

VAI recently sponsored "In Recovery," three forums covering a broad range of environmental design issues. The first, a forum on public health, exposed environmental risks in public schools and home offices. Claire Barnett represented New York Healthy Schools, a state-wide coalition of parental, environmental, public health, and education groups united around reforming state rules and guidelines for the construction and maintenance of public schools. Asher Derman, of Green October, an environmental consultancy for construction, warned of the dangers of working at home.

In the forum on defensible space, the concept of crime prevention through environmental design was argued from both sides. Zane Yost, an architect and city planner in the comprehensive tradition of Buckminster Fuller, saw a solution to the problem of defensible space through issues of scale. But Michael Conard of the New York City Housing Authority and Columbia University questioned the very use of defensible-space strategies in public housing.

The environmental justice movement condemns the disproportionate burden of environmental harm borne by communities of color and seeks to equitably distribute the benefits of environmental protection. In our forum on environmental justice, Rachel Godsil, of the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, addressed the problem of the lawyer's role within the environmental justice movement; Mojdeh Baratloo, a partner in Baratloo-Balch Architects, took up the questions of the role of design professionals working with communities and the role of the community in the design process; and Ghislaine Hermanuz, of City College Architectural Center, argued for the need for community design.

The following colloquy is an abridgment of the original discussions. For a more extensive account of the forums, see our website at <http://www.vanalen.org>

PUBLIC HEALTH, PUBLIC SPACE DESIGN

Claire Barnett

In 1993, we began a comprehensive study of the environmental conditions in public schools. We drew up a bill of environmental rights for school children, which serves as a mission statement against which actions can be measured. First, every child and school employee has a right to an environmentally safe and healthy school that is clean and in good repair.

Second, students, parents, and school personnel have the right to know about environmental hazards in the workplace. Community "right to know" and freedom of information acts theoretically give parents and stakeholders access to records of school buildings since they are public entities. But this needs to be affirmed and explicitly stated because you cannot exercise a right if you don't know about it.

The River Projects

On June 11, Van Alen Insitute opens "The River Projects" an exhibition of work from architecture studios led by faculty at Parsons' Department of Architecture and Environmental Design, New Jersey Institute of Technology, and University of Virginia. All the work addresses the challenge of designing architecture and public space that connects an urban context with the city's waterfront inspired by the example of The River Project environmental education center on Manhattan's west side.



How Green Can a Skyscraper Be?

Fox and Fowle Architects' Robert F. Fox speaks on his firm's design for 4 Times Square. Fox, a team of consultants, and his client, the Durst Organization, dedicated themselves to designing the first "green" high-rise, from demolition waste-management to the spandrels that work overtime as photovoltaic panels. While they



Fox and Fowle Architects

And third, schools should become role models for environmentally responsible behavior. We linked environmental and physical responsibilities because decayed and polluted schools are not community assets and are rare in communities attracting business investment.

In 1995, the General Accounting Office reported that decades of deferred maintenance and absolute neglect have left schools decayed and crumbling. Hazards include collapsing walls, leaking roofs, lead, asbestos, radon, toxic insecticides, polluted indoor air, and on-site storage of outdated inventories of art and custodial supplies. In

The Greening of Public Architecture

Under the leadership of Commissioner Luis M. Tormenta, the NYC Department of Design and Construction is now considering the costs and benefits of "greening" some of its programs. Assistant Commissioner Hillary Brown has been identifying potential demonstration projects and the department "may begin to mainstream some of these green building techniques into selected projects for our clients' facilities, capturing potentially significant operating cost savings, and providing optimal environments." Much like the private sector initiative in the design and construction of 4 Times Square, the department is looking at issues including lowering energy demands, improving indoor air quality, managing the construction-demolition waste stream and using non-toxic, renewable resource materials.

The Brooklyn Public Library has identified the new Kensington branch as one of several proposed demonstration projects.

The Department is developing outreach and education programs. For more information contact Hillary Brown (718) 391-1371.

addition to threatening children's health and ability to learn, the crumbling buildings depress real estate values, adversely affect business investment, and create liability problems for the schools.

In November 1995, The American Public Health Association adopted a new policy asking all public institutions and regulatory agencies to base their environmental decisions on a child standard since children are uniquely vulnerable to environmental threats. Rates of childhood cancer and learning and behavioral disorders are increasing, affecting educational outcome and costing schools millions in special services.

Since children must attend school thirty to forty hours a week, schools are in effect compulsory workplaces. Still, no environmental standards have been developed specifically for children, in contrast to the many occupational safety and health rules that protect adults - and public-school employees - in their workplaces. In addition, children and teachers across the state have encountered minor to disabling health problems in schools undergoing renovation. OSHA rules apply to the labor on a construction site, but not to building occupants. This problem will become increasingly urgent if New York City goes to year-round schooling to resolve overcrowding.

With the middle-class flight from city schools and the growth of non-public education, more and more public schools are filled with students at risk due to poverty, minority status, and disabilities. The New York State Education Department found that the poorest children often have schools in the worst condition. In the course of public hearings, it also discovered that even middle-class parents and teachers who requested improvements experienced harassment and retaliation. Parents would find their child bounced from reading group to reading group or their first-team soccer player benched.

Estimates for New York City to rebuild public school infrastructure currently run between \$5 and \$12 billion. Statewide estimates total \$20 to \$25 billion. That's consistent with national needs -- estimated at \$112 billion.

It will take more than just money to resolve these problems. New York Healthy Schools is working to put policy reforms in place. Dollars spent on facilities should be used to protect children's environmental health, minimize opportunities for corruption, and avoid the use of toxins. School facilities with long lifecycles should be built, in contrast to the fast and dirty suburban schools built in the '60's, which have now reached the end of their

may not have proved that skyscrapers are the most environmentally responsible building type (for that argument, see Ken Yeang's [The Skyscraper Bioclimatically Reconsidered](#), presented at a lecture and exhibit at the Architectural League earlier this Spring), they have already succeeded in demonstrating that "green design" can apply to commercial buildings. And in an impressive demonstration that a good idea can be carried through, the building's principal tenant, magazine publisher Condé Nast, has stated that the interiors will be "green" in their systems, materials, and finishes as well.

The talk, on Wednesday, May 28, 6:30 p.m., at the Parsons Auditorium (66 Fifth Avenue) is co-sponsored by the Parsons School of Design, Department of Architecture and Environmental Design.

Governors Island Park?

Governors Island continues to generate heat and some light on the future of the public realm in New York. Since the



Institute's landmark competition in Spring 1996, the city, state, federal government, private sector, and civic groups have been active in research and advocacy regarding the island's future. Not unlike the winning entries in the competition ("Open Narratives" and "Wired Island!"), two

useful lives and in many cases are not worth rehabilitating.

One success story is that the New York Board of Regents has adopted a bill of environmental rights. They have just issued guidelines for minimally toxic pest management and for the protection of occupant health during renovation. The Regents along with the New York State Department of Education are now training staff to use a new EPA self-help kit for schools with sick building syndrome and other ventilation problems. The kit details low-cost solutions schools can do on their own, without paying a consultant \$25,000 to tell them to open the fresh air vents. The EPA maintains that the kit can help resolve about 80% of school air-quality problems.

The New York State Research and Development Authority has received grant money for major renovations to produce at least two super-green schools. No model green school yet exists in the U.S., though experimental efforts are underway in Minneapolis, the Pacific Northwest, and elsewhere.

Asher Derman

As we muddy the boundaries between work and home, we may be losing ground in the environmental quality of both. The past few years have seen remarkable improvements in office environments and an increasing awareness of problems in manufacturing, energy use, and indoor air quality. Ever since the EPA demonstrated in the late '80's that outside air was two to ten times cleaner than the air inside homes and offices, people have been opening up fresh air sources.

But corporate America annually relieves half a million people of jobs and is now exploring alternative work concepts: teleconferencing, electronic workplaces, and "hoteling" (occasional office space provided for an out-of-office employees). By 2025, 18% of our work force (twenty million people) is projected to have done some primary work at home.

The home environment is chemically loaded. The EPA assessed the chemical contents of over a thousand household products. Many contained concentrations hazardous to your health in measurable dose/response tests. And at least eight chemicals on the list are carcinogenic. The chemical found to off-gas the most from furniture was benzene, a proven carcinogen. Benzene is not only found in home indoor air, but also in the breath of home occupants.

In the '80's, when Alfred Zan and John Bauer wrote Healthy House, it started a revolution in home office design. Initially these books were aimed at hypochondriacs and individuals with intense chemical sensitivity. But the prescription for avoiding toxic materials, electromagnetic fields, and a host of other issues has become standard practice for a lot of re-design offices.

The green revolution, however, has come with a disparity. Most of the work on green homes so far has been for a very select income bracket, people who can afford fine materials and labor-intensive finishes. If you can only afford a five-hundred-square-foot apartment in New York, you'll have trouble protecting the environmental integrity of your home.

In addition to toxins, the critical issue with office furniture is the reduction of the physiological impact of repetitive stress. Price generally reflects ergonomic gain, adjustability, and comfort level. We move quickly from a \$600 ergonomically designed chair by Steelcase to something from Bombay Company for \$250. Any cheaper, and you're better off buying your office seating used.

The furniture industry has regulated the kinds of chemicals it can use. Most manufactures have turned to

recent reports conclude that the highest and best use for the Island is as a park. The first report, issued by the non-profit civics (including Van Alen Institute) that make up the Governors Island Group, was presented March 27, where VAI trustee Elizabeth Barlow Rogers moderated. Prepared by a team of design and planning professionals organized by Regional Plan Association, "Public Interest" articulated a vision for the island as a park with a very clear regional mission -- not just for Lower Manhattan, not just for Brooklyn. For copies call RPA -- 212-785-8000. The second report, the result of an earlier study by the Urban Land Institute, was released soon afterward, and has many of the same conclusions.

Meanwhile, the General Services Administration, the federal agency handling the disposition of the island, has rescheduled its final public hearing (of the phase before it completes and issues a request for proposals document) from May 21st to early June. Also, GSA has offered three dates in June for tours of Governors Island. Call VAI for information.

The Institute has a limited number of copies of a report on the winning entries in the Spring '96 competition produced by the University of Pennsylvania Department of Landscape Architecture and Regional Planning. Illustrating the six premiated entries and additional entries by department students, it also includes a brief jury report by the competition co-author Andrea Kahn. Call or e-mail VAI for a copy.

water-based finishes to reduce off-gassing. Most use core material that is low in formaldehyde and powder-coat finishes on metal surfaces. All of these contribute positively to air quality in a working environment. Still, it is funny to think that a car seat is probably better than what we spend most of our lives sitting on.

IS DEFENSIBLE SPACE DEFENSIBLE?

Zane Yost

When architects speak of scale, they think of aesthetic ideas of proportion and balance, but I am interested in scale in all its aspects, particularly those concerning human beings and how they interact with each other. At ten times its normal scale, the human body would not function. Cities, too, are organic bodies, and many of their problems exist because they have gotten out of scale.

I believe one can only interact effectively with a couple people at a time. Even when talking to many people, we usually only address one at a time. We act and react at a very small scale. But city administrators, no matter how much they care, are so removed from this one-to-one scale that they cannot connect with their constituencies.

I started my career as a planner by studying the available research on urban problems and problem solving. If given the opportunity to design something, I wanted to use the best research ideas of the time. That seemed so obvious, but it's surprising how little architects use research. Hopefully my approach has made a difference to the couple hundred thousand people who have lived in my designs.

In a cost/benefit analysis of human needs and density, we found that the lowest cost meets the highest quality of life at the density level of suburbs. But we also discovered we could comfortably compress nine-thousand people into one square mile, about fifteen persons per acre. The nice thing about a one-square-mile village is that a half-mile walk gets you everywhere you need to go. You can increase the densities until you reach a super-high density of sixty persons per acre, at which point the community loses its definition.

Cities don't grow from their centers; they grow by multiple cell subdivision. People like to live in little places so they create small villages nearby, which grow until their edges touch. We may think we live in a city, but in fact we all live in villages. Even in the countryside, we live in villages. But most urban planning ignores this, instead following a theory of ring density zoning in which rings of decreasing density radiate from a single city center. At the village scale, which averages about ten thousand people, the demographic is largely homogeneous, residential, and oriented to women and children. Yet few policy decisions respect this constituency. We need to work at the neighborhood level. Our master plan for Bridgeport, which has taken the city twenty-five years to accept, is to recognize the villages and protect them.

To make one Bridgeport village defensible, we eliminated the city grid, substituting a superblock with a loop road surrounded by a perimeter defense of industrial zones, water, and open space. In other projects we introduced cul-de-sacs to similar effect. By closing forty street intersections with ordinary New Jersey barriers, we revived the most devastated community in Bridgeport. Crime has dropped 85% in the area. Kids play in the cul-de-sac streets. The neighbors have formed block groups.

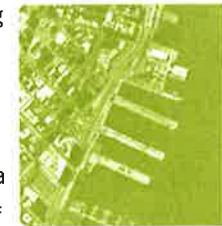
Waterfront Design Workshop

The Institute is sponsoring the New York Waterfront Design Workshop, an intense, five-week session that includes seminar and studio experience with a commitment to producing a collaborative research document that will impact the future of the waterfront. The project director, Miriam Gusevich, is currently a Loeb Fellow at Harvard's Graduate School of Design, and has worked as an architect, theorist, and public agency project director, including years of leading waterfront projects for the Chicago Park District.



Sun Shelter Competition

Van Alen Institute, the Young Architects Group of the AIA New York Chapter, and the Hudson River Park Conservancy are sponsoring a competition for the design of a sun shade structure to be located on Pier 54 at 13th Street in Manhattan. The sponsors will endeavor to build a portion of the winning design as an interim improvement on the site.



The competition is designed to give architectural designers an opportunity to have a positive impact on the public realm. Entries will be

Villages need clear boundaries. I am occasionally accused of ghettoizing, locking people behind gates. But the poor have the same security issues as the rich. We're not locking people in; we are giving them control over micro-territories. Only when you're dealing with very low-density communities out in the sticks does the argument you don't need fences hold some validity. Issues of control and ownership make private yards far more desirable to families than big public playgrounds. In so-called better suburbs, the street pattern is primarily dead-end, curvilinear cul-de-sacs. Whatever the intention, this strategy has proved successful in taming the excesses of the automobile.

Is defensible space defensible? The idea that it is not is ludicrous. We know about territoriality and the need for personal space. These are techniques by which we control the spaces we occupy. People can solve their own problems if their community is small enough. Then the control they exert over their own lives will be adequate to defend their own space.

Michael Conard

Mr. Yost describes a "super-high" density of 60 persons per acre, but the average for public housing in the five boroughs is 174. So our discussions of appropriate scale will diverge.

Since its publication in 1972, Oscar Newman's Defensible Space has been a wellspring for crime prevention in the design of public space. Its philosophy has served the political agendas of each subsequent Presidential administration and has become integrated into the urban ideas of coalitions in the design, social-science, and public-administration communities. Unfortunately, a substantial number of academic and professional inquiries have called into question the long-term effectiveness of defensible space strategies. Research substantiated by the National Academy of Science has indicated that implemented defensible space concepts are a short-term panacea for crime and succeed only in reducing the fear of crime.

Explanations for the inconsistent effectiveness of defensible space include the temporal condition of urban territoriality (areas controlled by police or residents at one time may be controlled by others at other times) and the interdependence of social and physical environments. Several social conditions that produce a violent environment have been confirmed. These include a high concentration of poor families, income inequality between populations, the presence of illegal drug or firearm trades, and conditions that impede a community's capabilities to supervise young males, such as population turnover, community transition, family disruption, and overcrowding. But research generally refutes

Building Fear

The Architecture of Fear, edited by Nan Ellin (Princeton Architectural Press: New York, 1997) examines the question of how architecture responds to "fear" from a cultural perspective as opposed to a defensible space approach. Through a series of essays by 20 different authors, the book investigates how the culture of fear impacts society from the local to the global, manifesting itself in everything from security systems, to gated communities, restricted "public" areas, and zoning regulations.

The current issue of ANY magazine entitled 'Public Fear,' addresses the same issue. The product of a panel presentation at the Guggenheim Museum this January, the issue is guest edited by Anthony Vidler, and addresses the ways in which phobias, fears, and anxieties have been "represented in media space and the arts in general." Essayists include Elizabeth Diller, Edward Dimendberg, Leslie Dick and Henry Urbach.

reviewed by a jury including Laurie Hawkinson, Guy Nordenson, Peter Rothschild, Tod Williams and representatives of the local community and HRPC.

Registration Deadline: July 31

Submission Deadline: September 2

Exhibition: At the Van Alen, September 9

Registration: For packet and registration materials send \$30 to AIA New York Chapter, 200 Lexington Avenue, 6th Floor, New York, NY 10016.

Competition for a Culture Exchange in Wall Street -- the '96 Paris Prize

The first three awards of the Paris Prize went to a trio of talented architectural designers, two of them recent



graduates (Syracuse and Cooper Union) and a third finishing her program at Georgia Tech. First Prize, The Paris Prize itself, went to Thomas T. H. Pen, of New York. The accomplished jury engaged in a long, arduous process, evaluating 229 entries notable for their design thinking and execution.

The competition has generated several programs: first a discussion of the value of competitions for architecture school studios, a second where New York entrants presented their work to each other;

the position that physical conditions create behavioral predispositions.

The concept of defensible space is further refuted by the archaeological and anthropological record, which almost universally supports the social view of man: that he is man because he is social, not that society is a device to restrain him from his natural excesses.

These findings are pertinent to both NYCHA, which has implemented a refined version of Newman's concept since the early 70's, and to HUD, which has been charged with the task of making defensible spaces by Secretary Henry Cisneros [Andrew Cuomo is the current Secretary of HUD], who cited Newman's data about the relationship between building height and crime and called for fencing and street closings. I think he actually referred to Mr. Yost's project in Bridgeport. NYCHA owns and operates many of the developments which form the foundation for defensible space ideas.

One of the NYCHA projects Newman retrofitted with a defensible space intervention is Markham Gardens in the economically diverse New Brighton section of Staten Island. Before implementing his improvements, Newman failed to consult the tenants, who expressed their outrage by immediately pulling up the shrubbery. An English writer named Simon Wilson describes a tour Newman gave of his projects. Throughout the tour, Newman seemed uncharacteristically nervous. Only later did Wilson learn that several of the tenants had apparently threatened to kill Newman if they ever saw him.

Public housing is often held as a symbol of urban pathology; for that we have Oscar Newman to thank. The high-rise project actually works in Manhattan. Smith Houses on the Lower East Side is a successful typology. It provides some of the only open space in a sea of historic fabric and has less crime than that fabric. The perception of public housing has suffered from an association with defensible space. When Newman conducted his study, the crime rate in public housing was below the city average, which might have lead one to suggest that public housing and non-traditional housing types actually deter crime.

NYCHA's design department, under the leadership of director David Burney, has assembled a multidisciplinary team of academics, professional experts, and NYCHA staff to review and evaluate NYCHA's open space. NYCHA owns 340 projects constituting 181,000 apartments on 2,500 acres with an official population of 440,000 (doubling up probably puts the actual population over 600,000). So the implications of this research are substantial. The major questions of this study are the long-term effectiveness of defensible space, the legitimacy of the statistical research that substantiated the theory, the validity of social control, and alternatives to its use.

There are two major companion issues to this study. One concerns the implications of the work of Jane Jacobs, whose thesis is that mixed land use in a primarily residential context promotes a denser pattern of use and greater social control.

Jacobs also targeted the replacement of the traditional relationship between houses, sidewalks, and streets, with high-rise buildings set in parks, typified by public housing, particularly after 1950. While in the outer boroughs, the location of crime supports her thesis, in Manhattan, the results seem to bear out just the opposite results: crime occurs more within the blocks of historic fabric, and less in tower-in-the park projects.

We hope this re-evaluation will bear a new generation of open-space strategies and block morphologies that will better reflect the unique urban character of New York City and solve some of the discrepancies in defensible space theory uncovered over the last twenty years.

and an ongoing round table on how significant, temporary structures can be realized in New York (this is an incremental process, which may lead to an exhibit and forum in the Fall). In addition, work from the competition has been exhibited at 55 Wall Street (The Information Technology Center), and at Windows on the World and the Shirley Fiterman Gallery of the Borough of Manhattan Community College (open June 9-27) as part of the "Lower Manhattan: Fact & Fantasy" exhibit organized by the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council.

While a brief, and we hope, pithy assessment is incorporated into the "post card report" (if you would like one, let us know), it should be noted that the results of the Paris Prize, not for the first time since it was inaugurated in 1903, have not been all sweetness and light.

As a good competition will, this year's generated controversy. No formal protests, but many observers were not shy about letting the Institute know that they were not in accord with the jury. To paraphrase: For a "Real Downtown/Virtual Downtown Project" competition, the winning entries seem notably disengaged from the "virtual" and other contemporary "exchange," and in general, did the prize winners challenge or did they undermine the competition's premise and specific program?

Toshiko Mori, who with Jacques Herzog, co-authored the competition, and also served on its jury, feels strongly that the winning entries did meet the competition's goals, and speaks to that

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Rachel Godsil

The NAACP/LDF is a national civil rights organization dedicated to challenging laws that have kept African Americans from participating as full citizens. Given this mandate, the LDF has relied heavily on "impact litigation" - seeking cases that will create precedents in the courts, which can then be used by others in similar situations. One Federal-court judge's decision will be used as an example by other Federal courts. The domino effect of impact litigation is a way for the LDF, a small number of lawyers, to maximize our effect.

One of the cases we are considering filing concerns a highway under construction in Ohio. The highway runs through a white community, which is getting sound walls, and an African-American community, which is not. This is an attractive case to me as an impact litigator. The injustice is very clear, so it won't involve a huge amount of resources. And I can challenge it with an important civil rights law, Title VI, an underused law that needs some bolstering in the courts so that people can use it in other contexts.

This approach, however, has been criticized by the environmental justice field: "impact litigation is a lawyer-centered, lawyer-defined strategy that disempowers affected communities, relegates them to victim status, and produces wins that may not improve the well-being of the community."

Instead of pursuing attractive lawsuits, they argue, we should be looking for cases where the community's needs are the greatest. This "environmental poverty" approach views environmental issues as opportunities to build broad social movements that will ultimately address other issues. The goal of the environmental poverty model is not to build precedents in the courts, but to empower the client community - a law of means, not of ends.

An incredible community group I worked with in East New York, Brooklyn fits the environmental poverty law model. In 1995, a waste-wood incinerator had been sited for East New York, and the State Department of Environmental Conservation decided that an environmental impact statement would be unnecessary. Impact statements are required in New York State if there's even a possibility that the proposed facility will have a significant impact on the community. Now, East New York is a very densely populated community, and this incinerator would have occupied a tiny industrial site within a much larger residential community. Nearby are day care centers, schools, senior centers, public housing projects, and single-family homes.

The head of Atlas Bioenergy presented his incinerator to the New York State Energy Resource Development Authority as an innovative way to produce energy. It would burn waste wood, transform it into energy, and sell it back to Con Edison. They were interested. So with their money and without bothering with permits, he started building his incinerator. After the state fined him \$15,000, he applied for his permit. Despite this willing violation of the law, they decided his proposal didn't need to be reviewed.

I called St. Paul's Community Baptist Church in East New York to see if the community knew about this. The community board organized a meeting where I presented my environmental impact review descriptions. And from there, the organizing just ballooned. At the next meeting, at the Brooklyn Borough President's Office, our demands for an environmental impact statement were met.

Our strategy was to combine the environmental impact statement with aggressive community input, and the people in the community were furious. We met once a week, averaging thirty to fifty people in attendance. My

eloquently in the "post card report." With her fellow jurors, she found an urban, New York authenticity to the winning entries--they were the projects that would be remembered years after their "temporary" run on Wall Street.

Is the competition in crisis in reaction to these conflicting views? Perhaps. Frankly, the Paris Prize was due for a crisis--for one thing, it has been in virtual space for so long, almost half a century since winners stopped going to Paris. If the extraordinary entries and jury pushed it into a real/virtual crisis, thank you, and contact the Institute for information on its evolution.

Van Alen Institute Dinkeloo Fellowship

58 remarkable portfolios came over the transom May 1 in competition for the Dinkeloo Fellowship. Founded in the 1970s in honor of Kevin Roche's long-term partner John Dinkeloo, the fellowship was established thanks to the vision and tenacity of former trustee Arthur Rosenblatt, FAIA. Today, it sends the winner to the American Academy in Rome (a co-sponsor of the fellowship), for a two-month stay, with supplementary income for travel.



Rhett Russo

The jury--Kenneth Frampton, Thomas Hanrahan, Guy Nordenson, and Jesse Reiser--worked to find

Environmental Justice at Harvard

On March 8, 1997, Glenn L. Smith, one of the organizers of the Environmental Justice Seminar at City College (whose work was at VAI last winter), presented "Environmental Justice Is..." at the Harvard Graduate School of Design. The moderators, noted architect M. David Lee and Van Alen executive director Raymond Gastil, encountered panels and audiences that included architects, community activists, attorneys, and developers. Environmental journalist Mark Jaffe declared class, not race, the prime factor in environmental injustice, architect David Lee spoke to the inequity in the media's priorities, focusing on the discussion of new stadium for Boston, say, rather than the ongoing problem of insufficient housing. Not surprisingly, the grassroots community activist, Klare X. Allen, gave the best definition of "empowerment," explaining that it was the teaching of others to go out and teach others so that the power structure was not the only source of information.

Design education and the academy were criticized for focusing on "high design," to which Loeb Fellow Miriam Gusevich responded that generalist attacks on the "academy" got us nowhere, a reasonable perspective from Gund Hall on a snowy day in March. Contact the Institute for a transcript.

who are watching every law that comes out, reading every lawsuit, or writing briefs constantly to hone their skills, because they're up against expert litigators hired by big corporations to defend their right to pollute. The ideal is to have both. Perhaps this problem applies to architects as well. How do you balance organizing with the high level of technical expertise your profession demands?

Mojdeh Baratloo

My involvement with communities started when a school-community board in Harlem invited me to teach children how to draw blueprints. I said, you're kidding; who wants to learn how to draw blueprints? They imagined this as an introduction to architecture, but we suggested teaching what we had learned in design school: construction, materials, structure, program, function.

The children were very engaged and very involved but soon started to question not only our concepts but the

role as a lawyer was essentially just to explain to people how this environmental review process worked.

At one meeting, one of the community residents mentioned some law that banned incinerators in apartment buildings, and didn't that apply here? It was a New York City law I had never heard of, so I asked some environmental lawyers, who said the law wouldn't apply here. But Charles Barron, the chair of the community group, pushed me to look it up myself. So I read through the Administrative Code and found the law: "No person shall cause or permit the installation of refuse burning equipment." The only exceptions were for municipally-sponsored facilities and medical-waste incinerators. This was neither. This is illegal.

We were getting ready to file a lawsuit. The community held rallies, got more press attention, and eventually the City denied the permit. At the victory celebration the group decided on a new name, East New York United Front. ENUF: "We've had enough, and we don't get enough." People began to focus on issues of crime and literacy and voting. That group is still in existence and still doing good work.

The hard question for me is how to balance the poverty law model with the impact model. You need people working in the communities, going to every meeting, respecting and benefiting from community expertise, and providing simplified legal explanations for educational purposes.

But you also need top-notch civil rights lawyers, people

the portfolio which best met the fellowship's mission of demonstrating that "architectural design in concert with technology can expand the concept and reality of the public realm."

The winner is Rhett Russo, with a project to study the application of structural concrete in the work of Nervi and Michelucci. The jury named Michael Silver the first alternate and awarded citations to Kate Mann, Kevin Rasmussen, David Ruy, Terry Surjan, John Veikos and Eric Worcester. Mann, Rasmussen and Worcester were also exhibited in the Cultural Exchange Competition Exhibition.

Survey

The Institute mailed out surveys to its membership and a randomly selected portion of its mailing list in late April, and has received scores of replies. The survey was developed by VAI intern Katherine Romero and two fellow students in the New York University Masters Program in arts management.

The results are intriguing. To summarize, respondents: 1) want expanded exhibit hours, especially Thursday evening and Saturday day; 2) think that Van Alen Reports are basically good, but not good enough; 3) find the location convenient but invisible (we're working on that, first step, repainting the lobby, second step, getting a banner out on the street); 4) want to hear

teaching methods we used. Their responses were rough and confrontational but made us realize that some of our assumptions about urban design were glossed over by terminology.

The program evolved into a series of challenging, intuitive projects dealing with issues in their own neighborhoods. In one project, we built their arguments and discussions into a series of urban communities. And through their discussion, they realized their original model (a traditional urban type) made for a pretty awful city because their buildings blocked the sunlight or you had to travel miles to work or children had to go far from home. We started talking about how to make a city more habitable.

In 1991, we started work on a little project on Bathgate Avenue between West 181st and 182nd, the northern edge of the South Bronx. The site, two and a half acres of vacant lot, has only one existing structure, P.S. 159, an elementary school. About eight years before our involvement, the community had started a very small community garden on the property that became a catalyst for community activism.

When P.S. 159 asked us to design a forty-by-forty-foot playground, we soon realized that a little playground in a garbage-infested lot with no shade and no access would never survive. So with no budget, we developed a master plan. We phased the project because if the money came, it would come in small increments, and each phase would have to sustain itself until the next could be funded.

The students, as part of their social science studies, began a clean-up program of the site, keeping an inventory of garbage collected. Over a period of five or six months, they documented five dead animals, a load of refrigerators, thousands of tires, more than eighty burned or discarded mattresses, four stripped cars confiscated by the police, a number of drug arrests, and two murders. Violence was a persistent presence on the site. We eventually called this project Territorial Imperative: Violence as a Method.

We envisioned the project as a series of layers, each protecting the one above it and each designed for a different segment of the community. The first layer is a band of trees that separates the city from the park while providing easy access for the elderly. The second is an athletic zone with exercise fields, a small baseball field, and a running track. On the hilly ground above, we sited the botanical zone, developed with the school for outdoor classroom activities. The topmost area, is the pastoral zone, a lawn where your baby can roll on the grass.

As professionals walking into circumstances about which we know little, we are compelled to decipher those circumstances and bring that understanding to our work. In the Bathgate case, the existing school and the community were already very strong, and their involvement was crucial. They introduced us to the community members and acquainted us with the demographics of the population and their programmatic needs. We relied on them to evaluate and review the project.

People call this work "community-based design," but I have never found the design process to be a communal activity. Community input is critical to understanding the context and can indicate a design process, but design itself is a very private exercise.

lectures and participate in interactive roundtables, but with a wide range of types of speakers, from artists in the public realm to "people who build," to "politicians who make decisions," to any number of prominent architects, to "government officials," to a call for a "dialogue between Donald Trump and John Hejduk" -- now that would be an evening to remember.

When the last survey comes in June 23rd, we'll do a more formal analysis, and outline a response. Many thanks for your responses so far.

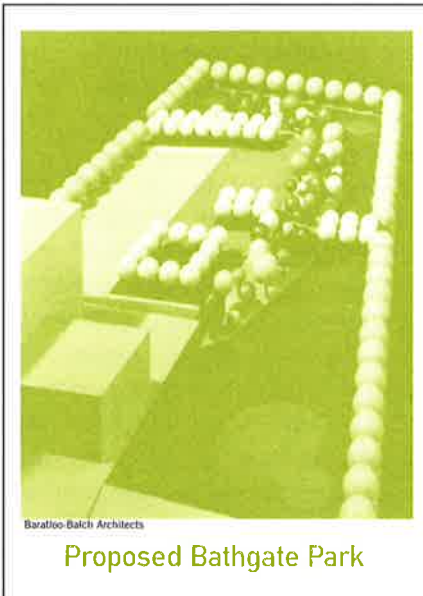
If you did not receive a survey, and would like one, please call, fax, e-mail. Also, we now have the survey on our website, and will keep it up through June 23rd, the date the Waterfront Workshop begins.

Contributions

The Institute is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, which welcomes and acknowledges tax-deductible contributions. Past and ongoing support has come from foundation, corporate, public, and private grants and contributions. Contributions are vital to the organization's mission, and are applied directly to program activities.

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Proposed Bathgate Park

Ghislaine Hermanuz

The project that led to our concern with environmental justice was the sewage treatment plant between 138th and 145th Streets on the Hudson River. When I arrived in New York in 1969, the Upper West Side was celebrating its victory in pushing its sewage treatment plant further up the Hudson. It was presented to the Harlem community not as a sewage treatment plant with a park above, but as a park with a sewage treatment plant underneath. And though the community really had no choice, it accepted the project on that basis.

The park they got had a malfunctioning sewage treatment plant. So seven years ago, the community started to organize, fought the Department of Environmental Protection and the City, and won a suit against the City. Now with a grant from the Department of Environmental Protection, they are redressing their environmental problems.

In that community, which runs from 125th to 155th Streets, from the Hudson to City College, we are working with a community group that deals with open spaces. This organization started with an interest in community gardens and has grown to the foundation of an open space conservancy for Northern Manhattan. Putting the land in the trust of the conservancy, the community will take control of its open and public spaces.

We helped them create the conservancy, developing an overview of the Northern Manhattan ecosystem and the resources at their disposal. We created a seminar to show the community the range of possibilities for their open spaces. We focused on four issues, generic problems of the type that an open space conservancy would have to face: for instance, how to use these spaces for economic development. We asked if electronic communication should be more than a private luxury (your computer in your kitchen). Could it instead be part of the public space as an amenity available to everyone, again, to promote a sustainable economy?

Another issue we investigated was the way people take over public spaces and make them their own, sometimes for the best. We looked at how a sense of ownership over spaces that are not clearly public or private - particularly the unbuilt land around housing projects - can improve their safety. Despite the designer's intentions, the fulfillment of certain needs is often more important than merely keeping what has been designed intact. What makes a space feel private, semi-private, or public? We looked for ways to re-create that sense of ownership.

We also studied how open spaces become the receptacle of the collective memory of a community. Conservation becomes a way of creating the history of the future. We looked at places where different cultural groups come together: a street, for example, can be a focus for those groups, instead of just a boundary, if they can find in the trees planted there or in the designs on the sidewalk something that reflects their own history or culture.

Environmental justice, for us, is not just the flip side of environmental racism. Our designs can make a difference. Even if it's at very small scale, we can create opportunities to transform communities. This change, however, cannot begin and end with us. The whole political machinery also has to support it. As designers, we cannot empower a community; the community must empower itself. But if it does, our proposals will give that empowerment form.

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SUMMER EVENTS

Forum:

"Four Times Square: Manhattan's Green Giant"

Robert F. Fox, Jr., Fox and Fowle Architects

May 28 at 6:30 PM

66 Fifth Avenue, Parsons Auditorium The Condé Nast Building, currently under construction at Four Times Square, will be the first skyscraper of its kind to be environmentally 'green.' Architect Robert Fox will present his firm's design and discuss the ways in which they are revolutionizing architectural design.

Exhibition:

"River Projects"

Opening June 11 at 6:30 PM

30 West 22 Street

Exploring the relationship between the rivers' edge and the city, Van Alen Institute presents an exhibition of student visions for sites along Manhattan's Hudson and East Rivers. Schools featured include New Jersey Institute of Technology, Parsons School of Design, University of Virginia and others to be announced.

Design Workshop:

**New York Waterfront Design Workshop
June 23 to July 25**

30 West 22 Street

The Waterfront Design Workshop will allow a group of young design professionals the unique opportunity to research, produce and present design strategies for the New York Harbor waterfront, addressing the transformation of the city's edge from a 19th-century industrial relic into a complex 21st-century resource. For more information, please contact the Institute at 212-924-7000.

Forum Series:

**New York Waterfront Forum Series
June 23 to July 25**

30 West 22 Street

Through June and July, the Institute will be presenting a series of lectures examining critical aspects of how New York's waterfront is shaped. Preliminary topics include a diverse range of subjects including art, transit and the role of communities. For specific dates and topics, contact the Institute.

VAN ALEN INSTITUTE

Van Alen Institute is a non-profit, century-old civic organization committed to improving the design and implementation of the public realm through Projects in Public Architecture incorporating workshops, competitions, public forums, exhibitions, reports, and an on-line interactive website.

A board of trustees, headed by a chairperson, sets Institute policy and oversees its operation.

The Institute's members contribute a fully tax-deductible membership fee and receive all invitations, announcements, Van Alen Reports, and other Institute documents. It has two full-time professionals on staff, as well as fellows and consultants for research projects such as the Waterfront Design Workshop, and paid and volunteer interns from architecture, planning, and arts management graduate programs, and a full-time administrative assistant.

The Institute uses its loft space in the Flatiron District as a forum and exhibition space, largely for Institute initiated programs, but on occasion for other groups such as The Waterfront Center, The Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation, and Architects/Planners for Social Responsibility.

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