

VAN ALEN INSTITUTE
30 West 22 Street
New York, New York 10010
tel 212.924.7000
fax 212.366.5836
email: vanalen@vanalen.org
http://www.vanalen.org

\$2.50

digital dilemma

11.99

VAN ALEN REPORT

6

digital dilemma

Where Is the 'Public' in e-topia?

Is Public Space Dead?
TKTS2K in Times Square
Megadesign vs. Other Urbanisms
Dinkeloo Fellowship
Green Plazas
Pier 40 Park
Real Estate = Architecture?
Zoning By Design

VAN ALEN
INSTITUTE

PROJECTS
IN PUBLIC
ARCHITECTURE

Van Alen Report focuses on fundamental challenges for improving the design of the public realm, combining visual and verbal essays, news, commentary and dialogue. We choose topics that cross the boundaries between design disciplines and broader public concerns. These challenges are at the core of the Institute's **Projects In Public Architecture**, integrating design competitions, workshops, websites, publications, exhibitions and forums.

Van Alen Report is a forum. As with our website, (www.vanalen.org), our goal is to create a public realm, and appropriately, the reconceived and redesigned Van Alen Report was first made possible through the support of a public entity, the New York State Council on the Arts, a State Agency.

Van Alen Report is published seasonally with additional special issues. 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.

5 FEATURE

Bay Brown

Is Public Space Dead?

8 NEWSFRONT

TKTS2K in Times Square

Megadesign vs. Other Urbanisms

Dinkeloo Fellowship

Green Plazas

Pier 40 Park

16 SOUNDBYTES

Real Estate = Architecture?

18 PLATFORM

Zoning By Design

Phyllis Lambert
Philip Nobel
Stefanos Polyzoides
Evan Rose
Barbara Swift

22 UPDATE

VAN ALEN REPORT 6

Raymond Gastil
Executive Director, Van Alen Institute

Bay Brown Editor

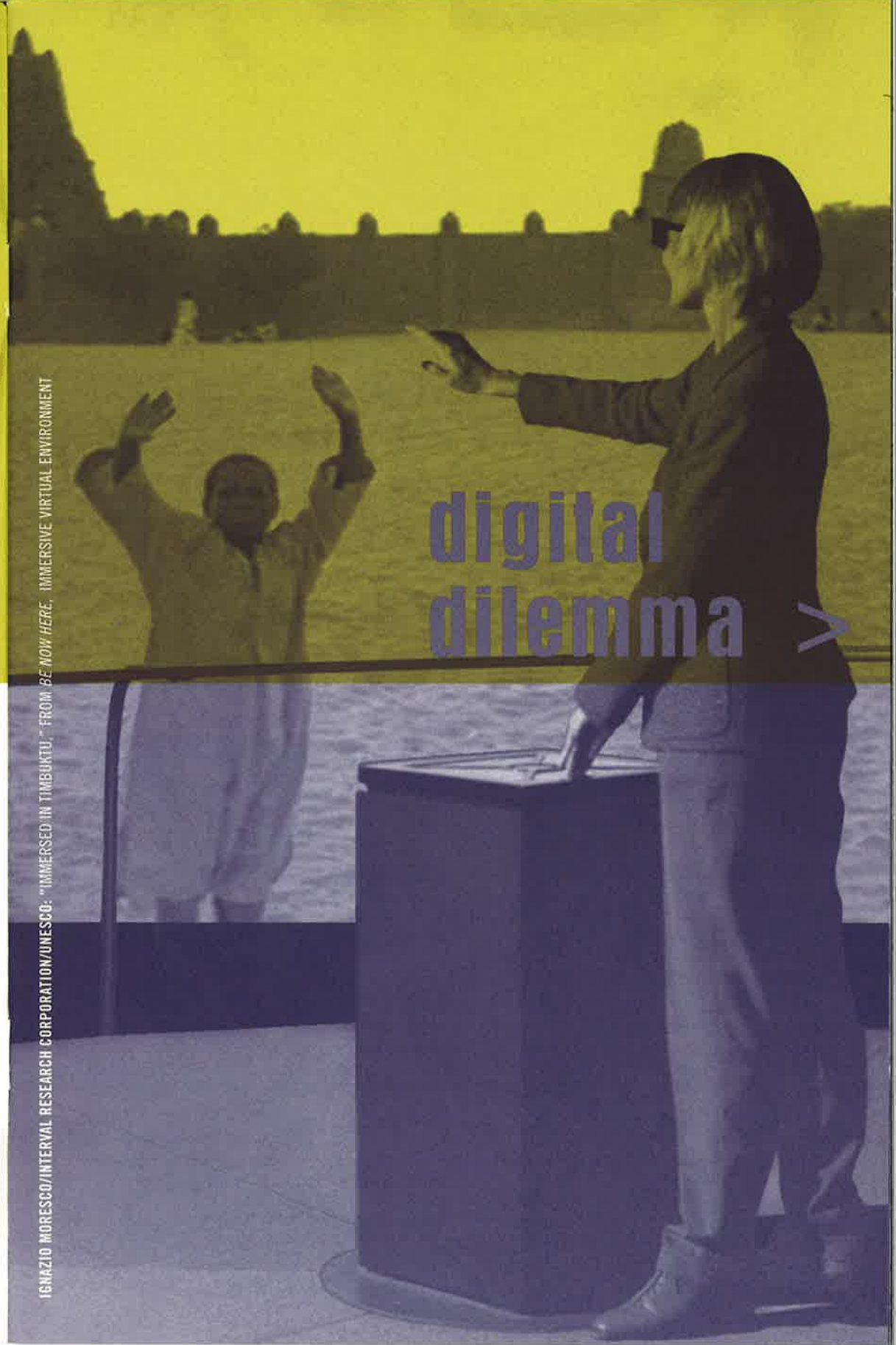
Casey L. Jones Editor-at-Large

2x4 Design Consultants

Illustrations: DB-TM Architects & Planners; Elizabeth Felicella; Martin/Baxi Architects; Ignazio Moresco/Interval Research Corporation/UNESCO; Morphosis; Ross Barney + Jankowski; Joel Sanders Architect; Ezra Stoller © Esto; PhotoDisc; Pier 40 Community Design Project.

Cover: circuit board on fire.
(PhotoDisc)

E-topia is a term used by William Mitchell in his book *e-topia: "Urban Life Jim - But Not as We Know It,"* The MIT Press, 1999.



IGNAZIO MORESCO/INTERVAL RESEARCH CORPORATION/UNESCO: "IMMERSED IN TIMBUKTU," FROM "BE NOW/HERE," IMMERSIVE VIRTUAL ENVIRONMENT

BY BAY BROWN

is public space dead?

V&A: TRINITY CEMETERY, HAMILTON HEIGHTS, MANHATTAN

Last spring the Graduate School of Design at Harvard University sponsored a conference entitled Exploring (New) Urbanism. The highlight was intended to be the session where New Urbanist leader Andres Duany and megaurbanist Rem Koolhaas were pitted against each other. A bit of an anticlimax, those ringside say.

But Koolhaas made a statement that has spurred further debate. A veteran provocateur, Koolhaas declared: "Public space is dead," implying that the utopian notion of traditional public space is a quaint, nostalgic relic of the 20th-century to be forever retired when the giant 1,000-pound Waterford crystal ball descends into Times Square on January 1, 2000.

Koolhaas pronounced that the ubiquity of technology has created a "universal city that exists wherever we are in the world." Issues of city and suburb are moot. "The real public space is invisible to the eye." >

NEWSFRONT

By the October 14 deadline, over 600 designers had submitted entries for the **TKTS2K** competition. That's hundreds more than any previous Van Alen Institute Design Competition, and is an extraordinary expression of interest by any international competition measure.

It is too early to report on the competition itself, however we are able to give an update on the larger issue of media's impact on public space by looking at a few changes in Times Square south of 44th Street.

Times Square has billed itself as the crossroads of the world for most of this century, and in its current incarnation it seems to have reinvented what that means. The huge banners around the district declare New York City as the Millenium Capital of the World, and at 44th and Broadway, one begins to get an inkling of the start of the new millenium.

First of all, it seems that it will involve a lot of young people gyrating.

On a late September day, you look up at the MTV studio, where boogie days go on behind the plate glass on the second floor.

Across on the bow-tie traffic island sits the new United States Armed Forces Recruiting Station, a formal, elegant building with some neon flash, designed by Architecture Research Office, a reminder that the armed forces may be the last officially "formal" organization in the world. But just north of the entrance, there it is again – young people dancing, while a video crew and art directors with clip-boards tell them what to do. Needless to say, tourists are busy videotaping the videoing youthquakers, while the locals just gape.

And behind you is the new second floor studio of ABC's Good Morning America designed by HLW International fronted by a huge, multi-floor, blindingly bright sign designed by Kupiec Koutsomitis Architects, featuring the district's

second Jumbotron screen. In today's public space, you can dance, join the Army or the Navy, be on TV – or just watch it – and none of these activities appear to be mutually exclusive.

It looks as though the public space of the future is going to be on a permanent adrenaline rush, and as amplified as the bodies of the wrestlers inspiring the World Wrestling Federation theme restaurant scheduled to open in staid 1501 Broadway. At least we know one thing. The next century is going to be loud, physical, and virtual all at once. V&A

Two studies underway on Manhattan's **WEST SIDE** have awakened the age-old debate: Which serves cities better, wholesale re-development or incremental growth?

The dividing line for the investigations is West 34th Street. To the south, the International Foundation for the Canadian Centre for Archi-

In a capitalist society, where private property is implicit, public space is always being encroached upon by greedy analog man. How is the digital Goliath further altering this tenuous balance?

Are we under threat of living in discrete pods, physically alienated from each other, yet living generic existences where everybody has access to everything instantly, and is virtually everywhere at a mouse's click? If I long for public space I can "immigrate" to (activeworlds.com), where for \$19.95 a month I can enjoy the privileges of "citizenship" and join the other members of my "community." I can build my own building in this virtual community, which apparently has the acreage of California. For that matter, I can even "Buy A World" an icon teases.

There is a deceptive language here that appears to do double duty, a lexicon that works on and offline. The structure of the Internet may lend itself to using terms like chat room, firewall, site, and its creators may even call themselves architects, but maybe the experience is not so analogous. Perhaps the most provocative digital/analog transference is the word "community" with its multifold meaning.

Nineteenth-century utopian movements married new building types and new modes of communal living with their socially-infused ideologies. What is today's revolution going to build and, moreover, what is it going to take down with it?

William Mitchell, dean of the School of Architecture at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and author of the recent book *e-topia: "Urban Life, Jim – But Not as We Know It"* might say e-topia is the Y2K version of utopia. Other urbanists tell how they see the digital impact on public space.

PRIVATE=PUBLIC

Digital technology is a catalyst, arguably replacing a tired paradigm in a prophetic manner befitting the millenium, but it is also means to an unprecedented invasion of privacy jeopardizing unalienable rights.

"A serious threat to the commons comes from individuals (backed by collaborating governments) who lack the respect for others that is the essential ingredient of public space. These people publicly exploit diverse technologies to express their disdain for others," bemoans historian Gregory Dreicer, currently teaching at the Center for New Design at Parsons School of Design. "Once, a booth contained a private conversation. Today, the voices of cell phone users slash into pieces public environments: restaurants, trains, and sidewalks."

The digital blurs the traditional division between public and private through more invasive means, like ever proliferating surveillance cameras and through personal profiles created by the digital cookie crumbs you leave on the websites you visit. Sometimes this is for private gain and other times it is done in the name of security.

Venerable institutions of democracy like public schools routinely install metal detectors and video surveillance. The design for the Federal Campus in Oklahoma City, the replacement for the destroyed Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building, has the directive of representing the U.S. Government with the magnanimous outstretched arms of representational democracy while simultaneously maintaining the security of a fortress. It is disturbing that these public venues are more about public defense than public discourse. This is a man-made tragedy: technology defends man from himself.

But as the public building grows opaque, the home is becoming transparent. Digital technology is permeating the domestic realm, thereby making it more public. The home is no longer a private refuge. The advance of the live/work generation suggests a fortress-like existence, but in reality, spatial boundaries diminish not simply through the Internet, but other gadgets of the digerati like video conferencing and worksite webcams. >

ecture (IFFCA) sponsored its first Competition for the Design of Cities, an invited prize that focused on the area around and including the Penn Station railyards.

North of 34th Street, the Hell's Kitchen Neighborhood Association and the Design Trust for Public Space have sponsored an ongoing investigation of Hell's Kitchen South, stretching from 34th to 42nd streets.

Charged with developing "bold reexaminations of existing models of urbanism," the five entries in the IFFCA competition – including Peter Eisenman's team's winning project – draw on the tradition of architecture at the scale of infrastructure. The projects, submitted by internationally known designers, all envision a new urban landscape that obviates the existing neighborhood.

Although formally more sophisticated than large-scale development initiatives like Battery Park City and Riverside South, the proposals offer

the same "complex use of public space," "variety of year-round uses," and "fluidity of access," in their attempt to move the area toward a more vital and dynamic neighborhood.

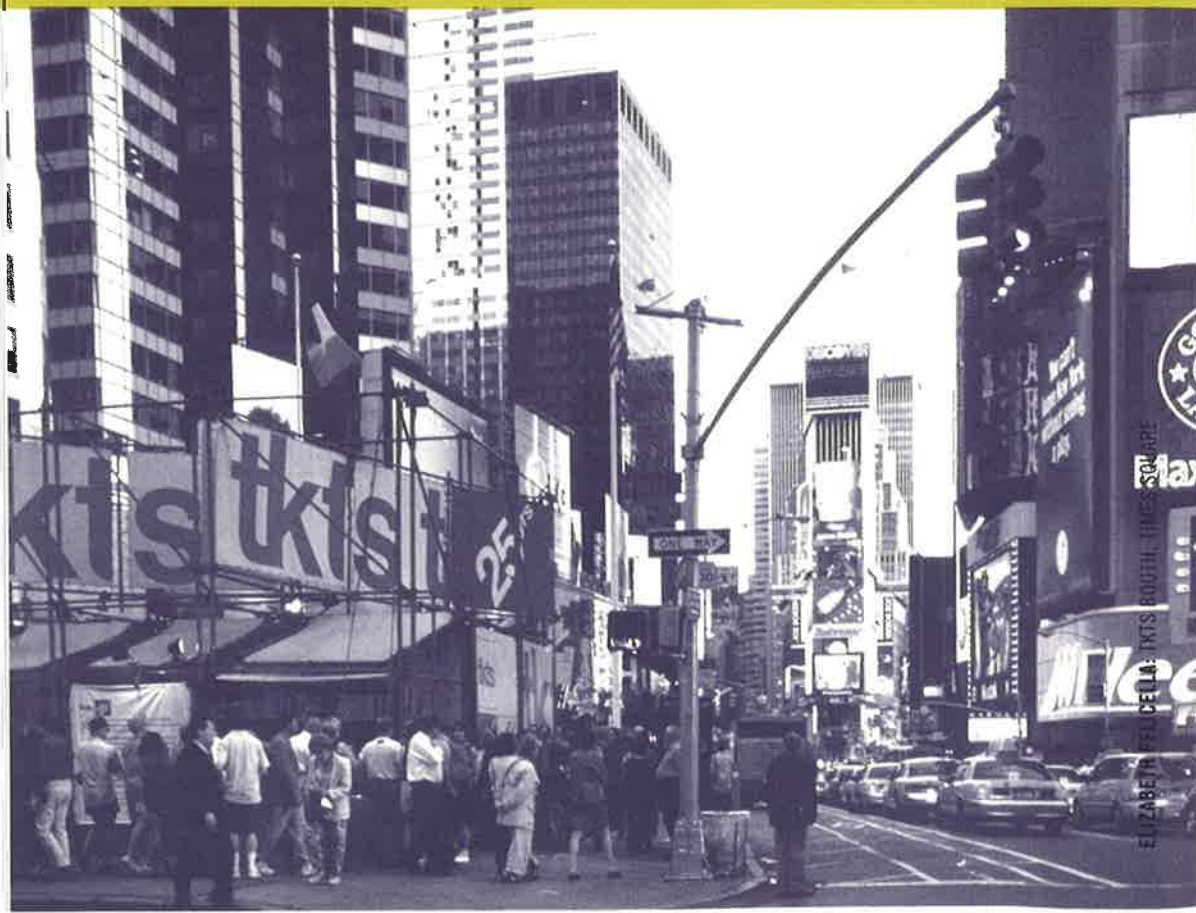
In contrast to the high-profile work of the IFFCA competition, a federation of neighbors, design consultants, and the Design Trust have been working over the summer with 13 multidisciplinary teams to develop a series of community-based visions for the future. Entitled *Other Urbanisms*, the projects knit

changes in the neighborhood into the area's unique physical landscape of access ramps, empty lots and aging architecture. While progressive in their design, the studies are more Jane Jacobs than Robert Moses in intent.

Central to the discussion of the two efforts is how cities should effect change in large districts like Hell's Kitchen or the Penn Station railyards area. Is bold master planning required or can community groups, working from within, make the city a better place?



Panorama of Morphosis' submission for the IFFCA competition for Manhattan's West Side.



"Whereas the industrial revolution forced the separation of home and workplace, the digital revolution is bringing them back together," declares Mitchell.

At *The Un-Private House*, the recent exhibition at The Museum of Modern Art, the private home was presented as something both physically transparent and digitally hooked up, inexorably linked to the public world beyond. Many of the houses were designed for non-nuclear families, where the traditional division of space was inappropriate, or for clients who had hybrid needs.

Architect Joel Sanders, whose *House for a Bachelor* was included in the MoMA show, sees technology as yet another peeling away from the private. "Digital communication has only further problematized the already unstable boundaries between public and private space. Rather than bemoan the loss of the private – a concept that never existed in the first place – architects need to investigate the tectonic ramifications of the private home as a site of public exchange," says Sanders. "Virtual space changes our relationships to actual space, making face-to-face contact and tactile experience qualitatively different and more, not less, significant.

"As the home increasingly becomes a global way-station, architects will find themselves reconfiguring not only individual homes to accommodate new modes of living and working but also entire neighborhoods, as people seek alternative local venues like cafés, supermarkets, and gyms as replacements for the kinds of embodied interactions that used to take place in traditional public spaces."

Curator of *The Un-Private House* show Terence Riley likewise sees this dissolution of boundaries extending beyond the microcosm of domesticity, extending to the landscape beyond urbanism. "Just as the public-private duality is being rethought, so too is the relationship between the 'natural and man-made.' In the case of the latter, the landscape is emerging as an extension to the public-private debate: as the landscape becomes less 'natural' it also becomes more >

Entries for the IFFCA competition are online at (ca.qc.ca/prize). Proposals for Hell's Kitchen South are on view at Storefront for Art and Architecture from mid-November through the end of December. cJ

The Institute's 1999 **DINKELOO FELLOWSHIP** has been awarded to Nicholas A. de Monchaux. Quinn Schwenker was additionally selected as an alternate, while both Victor Agran and Cheryl A. Spector received citations.

The Dinkeloo competition called for portfolio submissions demonstrating an environmentally conscious understanding of contemporary architectural design in concert with technology. The fellowship was founded in honor of John Dinkeloo (1918-1981) of Kevin Roche John Dinkeloo & Associates.

The award consists of a \$7,000 grant to be applied to a two month stay at the American Academy in Rome and a month of additional travel. The jury included Diana Balmori,

Keller Easterling, Michael Manfredi, Karen Van Lengen and James Wines.

The jury commended de Monchaux, M.Arch. Princeton 1999, for his fellowship submission, *Green and Simple: A Proposal for Study of the Intersection and Interdependence Between Ecological and Aesthetic Minimalism*. De Monchaux plans to research the topic during his travels and curate an exhibition in the U.S. upon his return.

James Wines, head of the department of architecture at Pennsylvania State University and author of the forthcoming book *The Art of Architecture in the Age of Ecology*, issued a challenge in his jury comments: "Most of the entries fell into one of two categories: 1) A narrow interpretation of 'green,' seen only as some kind of resource-saving technology (missing all of the social, psychological and philosophical implications); 2) The superficial use of 'green' as a cosmetic idea applied to business-as-usual design." BB



De Monchaux's Dinkeloo portfolio included his rendering of Basildon Town Centre for DB+TM Architects, London.

ROSS BARNEY + JANKOWSKI, DESIGN FOR FEDERAL CAMPUS, OKLAHOMA CITY



In e-topia do we have to dispense with public space as a place where democracy is cultivated?

The 5-acre plaza at the World Trade Center may be redesigned as the financial district increasingly becomes a 24-hour community. Hoping to draw nighttime visitors, Swanke Hayden Connell Architects has designed a **TILTED LAWN**, a sloping grass amphitheater to replace the complex's central fountain.

When designed the WTC's vast plaza had auspicious intentions, an elegant piazza in the heart of Wall Street. Instead, it ended up an underutilized wind tunnel lacking a human scale. In the past four years the area has seen a growing residential community, and so this year the WTC launched a series of evening music and dance performances staged on a temporary structure.

"We need to become a 24-7 community," said Cherrie Nanninga, director of real estate for The Port Authority which owns the WTC. In recent years, The Port Authority has sought a mixed-use vitality: introducing shops and restaurants on the

first floor and destination shopping in the concourse mall. If The Port Authority goes through with the project, it should cost approximately \$7 million.

The tilted lawn would face a pneumatic drawbridge spanning a reflecting pool, which when raised would double as the stage. An attenuated blade-like skylight would house a new escalator descending to the concourse mall right at its heart, adjacent to The Gap and Banana Republic.

"The shape is a very aggressive act," says project architect Howard Leist. "It proclaims itself to the plaza. We wanted to create something that incorporated natural living elements, but that was clearly a man-made imposition."

BALSLEY PARK, currently under construction in midtown, is likewise moving away from the axial grid towards more organic forms with its elliptical sloping lawn the park's main visual feature. Landscape architects Thomas Balsley

Associates designed the eponymous park located on the southeast corner of 57th Street and Ninth Avenue.

Southcroft LLC, the owners of The Sheffield and the neighboring ½-acre Sheffield Plaza, renamed the "bonus plaza" after its designer in gratitude for a park design that the community quickly endorsed, expediting the design review process after years of impasse. With its playful shapes and bustling farmers market, Balsley Park bodes not to be a passive vest pocket park.

Furthermore, rarely is a client so impressed by a designer's work that the limestone is carved with their surname. Naming a public park after a private practitioner underscores the bizarre typology of the bonus plaza, straddling public and private. Bonus plazas may be a dying breed in New York as planners question the public benefits of allowing developers to push the zoning envelope in exchange for providing this kind of public space. BB

public," says Riley. "Few ideas have as much potential to exploit in the coming years as the transformation of the landscape."

Carrying the New Urbanist banner, James Howard Kunstler, author of *The Geography of Nowhere: The Rise and Decline of America's Man-Made Landscape*, is also concerned with how this duality relates to the landscape. For Kunstler, the predicament of public space is that we have turned it into a universal automobile slum.

"In the meantime, public space in America, and the civic life that has to dwell within it, becomes increasingly damaged, crippled, and impoverished. My own belief is that economic and political forces are underway in the world that will soon require us to live differently, whatever our theoretical orientation," Kunstler forewarns. "History is merciless. We are a wicked people and we deserve to be punished."

Mitchell fears that the digital revolution could yield a disparity similar to the urban flight and sprawl wrought by the introduction of the automobile. As the digital revolution sends people home as telecommuters, local neighborhoods will be revitalized and reconfigured, making the rigor of current land use zoning obsolete. All very positive community-building, but Mitchell ultimately fears a stratification of classes: an urban polarity, "dual cities" where the poor and the wealthy are increasingly estranged as the "haves" lose their dependency on the "have-nots."

SERENDIPITY IN E-TOPIA?

Is this alarmist? In e-topia do we have to dispense with the modern canon of public space, as a place where democracy is cultivated, where there are opportunities for chance meetings with diverse people – the stuff of urban life?

Eric Liftin, principal of New York-based MESH architectures + environments + web spaces, believes that in our contemporary society where all activities garner corporate sponsorship nobody wishes to be responsible for creating and maintaining public spaces. Liftin believes the web can pick up the baton of spontaneous urban encounter.

"The Internet has emerged as a system with potential for a kind of urban experience, Web urbanism. Web urbanism is the migration of traditional urban experience to the Web," says Liftin. Like cities, the Web originally was begun under public auspices, but soon became commercial. "Web urbanism demands that one react to unfolding events in concert (or conflict) with others, not as a solitary observer. Web urbanism must prove itself necessary. It must make shoppingbrand.com look like a lonely minimal."

"There is no 'planning' in cyberspace. Public space cannot be imposed on the public. But there is a chance to build systems that recreate the dynamics of traditional public space so engaging that they define new infrastructures for the network," Liftin predicts.

Andrew Shapiro, lawyer, writer and senior advisor at The Markle Foundation, may have a solution that will make Liftin's Web urbanism work. In his book, *The Control Revolution: How the Internet is Putting Individuals in Charge and Changing the World We Know* (www.controlrevolution.com), Shapiro explains how democracy is threatened by the Internet and proposes PublicNet, a model for preserving public space and free speech. Like Liftin, Shapiro believes that the Internet provides the infrastructure for democratic forums and what is currently missing is diversity and fortuity.

"President Clinton has declared that the Net is becoming 'our town square.' If so, then we should design and use the Net so that it has some of the serendipity of a Times Square or Hyde Park," writes Shapiro. Shapiro's PublicNet would be an online space that would function >

Pier 40, the 14-acre mid-century modern parking garage with a great river view, may soon be given a use befitting its prominent waterfront site. This summer, Community Board 2, Manhattan approved **PIER 40 PARK** (www.pier40.org), a community design project. The 50-person board endorsed the scheme as they believe it promises an appropriate adaptive re-use for Pier 40, the largest site of the newly formed Hudson River Park.

The architects were introduced to the design problem as winning entrants of the recent design competition for Pier 40, co-sponsored by the Institute and the community board. Inspired by the nearly 150 entries received in the competition, the goal of the Pier 40 Community Design Project was to create a compelling plan for this publicly-owned pier located on the Hudson River at West Houston Street.

Pier 40 Park was a collaboration of a team of architects from Germany

led by Sebastian Knorr, including Jochen Brandt, Heiko Ostmann and Michael Triebswetter, and a New York-based team comprised of Majid Jelveh and Christian Joiris. Both teams were competition winners.

The designers listened to what the community wanted to see on the pier and in turn presented a concrete and well-developed project. They volunteered their time and services to develop a physical solution for how this 14-acre former passenger ship terminal could become a fitting recreational anchor for the park and the greater neighborhood.

City Councilmember Christine Quinn enthusiastically endorses Pier 40 Park. "I think it is terrific. I am really excited about the possibility of Pier 40 being transformed into a beautiful jewel of a park," says Quinn. "This plan provides for open space, passive recreation, ball parks, dog runs, and soccer fields and it also keeps the vast majority of the parking that is there now."

In their forward-looking design, the architects included proposals for income generation for park maintenance, including retaining most of the current 1,800 long-term parking spots through using an innovative automated system.

"Both the Greenwich Village and Chelsea communities are excited about this stunning design. The fact that there is consensus in the community – that elected officials and the community board like the plan – is a huge step," says Quinn. "The next step is to secure the millions of dollars in funding from the city, state and through private fundraising as well."

The community design project was sponsored by P3, The Pier Park & Playground Association and led by an independent steering committee, which included Tobi Bergman, Leroy Callender, Anthony Dapolito, Raymond Gastil, Alan Gerson, Judith Heintz, John Jay Iselin, Jeff Lydon and Shirley Secunda. **BB**



MORNING
period

WORLD CLASS ELECTRONICS
WORLDWIDE PARTNERSHIP

the year 2100

DieselStyleLab

418 West Broadway

NYC TAXI
2879

VAI: UNITED STATES ARMED FORCES RECRUITING STATION, TIMES SQUARE, DESIGNED BY ARCHITECTURE RESEARCH OFFICE

<continued>

as a street corner in cyberspace providing a forum for all voices. The PublicNet icon would be linked to an endless digital public forum, an aggregation of web sites and chat rooms. The randomness characteristic of real public space would be ensured as different speakers periodically solicited user's attention through banners running across the PublicNet icon.

PUBLIC=PRIVATE

Tony Hiss, author of *The Experience of Place* and currently a visiting scholar at New York University's Taub Urban Research Center likewise sees the Internet as an ally for public space, making information and resources about urban and open space easily accessible to the public, creating new constituencies and awareness.

"Technology and the Internet are not adversely affecting public space. People have the same needs to be in each others presence. Instead, they allow for more sharing of information," says Hiss, citing Van Alen's website (www.vanalen.org). "The more we reclaim places that were once privatized – like the waterfront – the more they are part of everyone's life."

In a joint project, The New York City Department of City Planning, The Municipal Art Society, and Jerold Kayden, professor of urban planning at Harvard, are also employing technology as a tool for public space in the *Privately-Owned Public Space Project*. Kayden has undertaken a survey of New York City's 330+ privately-owned public spaces (plazas, arcades, indoor spaces, small parks, etc.). These places were primarily established through the City's 1961 zoning resolution which encouraged the creation of public spaces on private properties in exchange for zoning allowances.

Given the ambiguity about ownership and stewardship, Kayden has seen numerous instances where the public is physically discouraged or forbidden to enter through the erection of gates,

R6.14

spikes on ledges, removal of seating and even doormen telling people the areas are private.

The initial goal of the project is to determine the correct legal status of each of these places. The findings will be published in *Privately-Owned Public Space: The New York City Experience* in spring 2000, but will, moreover, form a database accessible by the Internet to include the legal status of each site. The ultimate result may be changes in enforcement or in the zoning resolution itself.

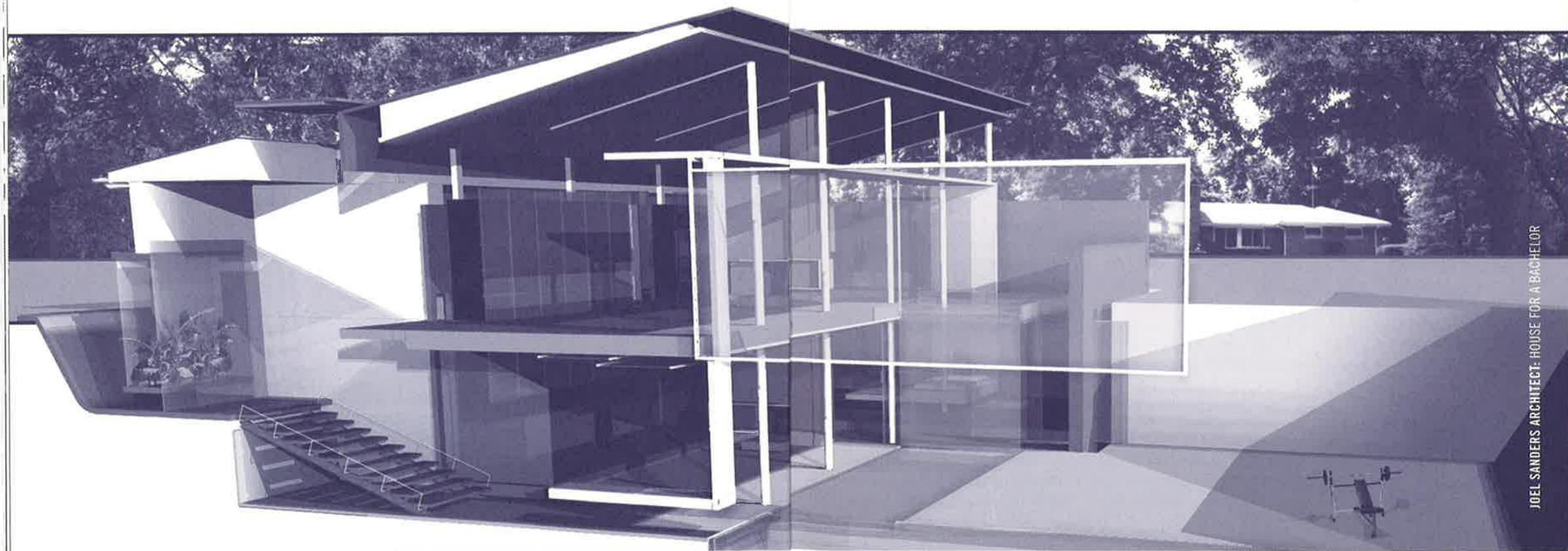
NEW MEDIA/PUBLIC SPACE

Architect and interactive media designer Kadambari Baxi believes the critical questions facing public space are related to issues of media – not only the so-called "new" media – but all media as they continue to be reshaped by the ever expanding telecommunication networks.

In "Homeoffice," one of a series of explorations in *The Entropy Project*, which Baxi developed along with partner Reinhold Martin, a new aggregate space is created by overlaying images taken from "utopian" advertising and "dystopian" films of the 1960s onto Skidmore Owings & Merrill's First National City Bank in Houston. The public's perception of space through this media filter in turn creates new space without a finite character.

"What are the limits of 'non-space,' when the neutrality of its location no longer matters, but what is at issue is how it is accessed, utilized and distributed?" Baxi asks. "How can images – not only available in abundance, but also as dematerialized bits of data – be transformed into raw materials for creating realities – actual, virtual or imagined?"

Media artist Michael Naimark of Interval Research Corporation, who has produced public space installations exploring place representation for over twenty years, is also optimistic that technology will become a foot soldier for public space. "At best, bold new forms of virtual and actual



JOEL SANDERS ARCHITECT: HOUSE FOR A BACHELOR

community will appear: Imagine actual public spaces wired together by ultra-high bandwidth network connections, where actual neighbors are co-present with virtual ones. Imagine a public space for 100 people tapping 100 times the bandwidth available to the home (whatever the bandwidth). Imagine an Imax-meets-the-Web immersive interactive public space," suggests Naimark.

"This would be a draw for many to leave their homes, just as live theater and cinema are over television, as museums and galleries are over catalogs, and as game arcades are over home video games," says Naimark. "At the moment, no such networked media-rich public spaces exist. This is a niche screaming to be imaginatively filled."

POST-DIGITALISM

The way new technology is affecting public space is clearly diffuse. What is it we value that it is threatening? Maybe nothing. Perhaps we are inured, despondent, sick of the urban spontaneity that traditionally defines public space. In New York, the subway – a one-time new technology and perhaps the most significant social equalizer in the five boroughs – is that place where we court serendipity and diversity. With telecommuting, perhaps I will no longer have this daily pleasure only possible through propinquity. Maybe it is more pleasant to stay home with my non-sentient computer, but in a democracy isn't there a social, political imperative? How can designers of real and virtual public spaces work in complementary ways to maintain community and civic life? Whither utopia? If we transport ourselves to a time when MoMA is hosting a show on Post-Digitalism, what will designers be trying to recapture? **STOP**

MARTIN/BAKI ARCHITECTS: "HOME OFFICE," THE ENTROPY PROJECT

Take it anywhere



SOUNDBYTES

Van Alen periodically poses questions to our listserve and posts responses on our website (www.vanalen.org). To join please send an e-mail to vanalen@vanalen.org. Here is a sampling of recent feedback.

HOW IS INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY CHANGING PUBLIC SPACE?

> Telecommunication technologies create new forms of space which are simultaneously everywhere and nowhere. These new "distributed" spaces alter social behavior, change our relationship to physical space and, ultimately, transform both the character of the city and its role within a society.

As individuals develop communities which are more narrowly defined and distributed over broad geographical areas, public identity, and consequently

public space, is extended beyond the traditional boundaries of culture and locality and begins to reflect the networked structure of these new, essentially private, communities. It is this privatization of the public realm which characterizes the space of the new city as well as the changes to existing urban centers.

The impact of this shift is most apparent in the changing fabric of the American city where private interests increasingly dominate urban planning and development. While privatization is, perhaps, antithetical to the notion of public space, the challenge remains for the architects of these new spaces to create places which enable the construction of a society which is responsive to its citizens by facilitating broader understanding between individuals.

This, after all, is the essential role of design in the public realm.

--Ian P. Worley
Ian.Worley@Viant.com

> The spatial definition of public has been worn out, undermined and colonized by the forces of development and commerce. The 19th-Century definition of public space has been jettisoned for "garden seating" within a privately controlled and managed private setting.

The critical point of focus in late capitalism is the discursive public realm. This is where information technology has the most potential to achieve a systemic change in the role and function of post-industrial public culture.

There is the potential, but little proof that the electronic realm can support a community dialogue which tran-

scends the needs of time and space. The Well and Echo begin to illustrate these ideas, but there is little to indicate that any city has met the dual challenges of technology access and use/training to enable an equitable public dialogue.

--Tim Collins
tcollins@andrew.cmu.edu

> IT [Information Technology] is quickly sucking the life out of existing public spaces. New public spaces are becoming awash in flashing information. Where can the city dweller hide from the nuisance? Does the city dweller even know the need to hide from the nuisance?

--Brian Van Winkle
bvanwinkle@urbanarch.com

FROM THE THE NEW YORK TIMES
REAL ESTATE SECTION TO THE NEW
REAL ESTATE AND DESIGN MAGAZINE

GRID, DEVELOPERS SEEM MORE INTERESTED IN DESIGN. DOES THIS MEAN NEW YORK WILL BE GET BETTER CONTEMPORARY ARCHITECTURE?

> It depends on the reading given to the word "design." City Planning Commissioner Joe Rose's recent speech describing five ways to reform zoning includes an exception to the new height and bulk limitations: a reward for exceptional design. "Let us instill beauty into the powerful economic drive of this city's real estate entrepreneurs."

Is he, too, taking up only one aspect of design, the wrapper, instead of the entire package? And why are we bribing developers with zoning bonuses in return for excellent design?

Why don't we expect good design "as of right?" The ultimate result of a developer

focus on design defined one-dimensionally is slick corporate marketing for the developer-orchestrated project.

--Joan Rothschild
jrjar@worldnet.att.net

> The question as to whether developers' interest in "design" will benefit New York's architecture of the future will depend largely on what is meant by "design." Good design needs to be defined and not left to the whims and fancies of developers and other untrained "experts."

I would prefer to think that New York and for that matter other cities throughout the world will be getting "better" architecture but from what I see in the international media, the trend seems to be for "bolder, brassier and uglier" cityscapes. I hope I am wrong!
--Bill Wheatland
wheatlab@mpx.com.au

Chairman of City Planning Joseph B. Rose has proposed significant reforms in New York City's zoning ordinance. Among them are new height and bulk rules, as well as an exemption that has raised a few eyebrows:

The public process should be able to grant waivers from some regulations on the basis of exceptional design. Let us instill the quest for beauty into the powerful economic drive of this city's real estate entrepreneurs. If that extra height is so important, let it be the developer's architect who earns it, not his lawyer.

Unfortunately, the public sector everywhere has a pretty dismal record when it comes to involving itself in subjective aesthetic decisions and the subject is fraught with practical and legal pitfalls. But if we can bend over backward on behalf of great old buildings, I am confident we can figure out how to do so for great new ones too. To that end, (and hopefully to avoid the mistakes other cities have made in this area) I will be convening an advisory body to help us figure out how we can prudently introduce such values into our zoning.

Should these aesthetic decisions be within the purview of the planning commission? Should there be a new design commission? At the same time there are rumblings that the city's art commission may be done away with – taking a look at our contemporary public art and design, do you think this appointed body is serving its constituency? How can design be legislated?

WHEN THE EIFFEL TOWER was first proposed it was widely reviled. The Seagram Building and Lever House are sublime; hundreds of clumsy glass towers across the U.S. are banal, at best. Most people have difficulty noting the difference. The round, all glass 101 California office tower has been simultaneously rated the best and worst building in San Francisco in people's choice polls.

Aesthetic decisions are not objective, thousands of years of philosophical treatises to the contrary. What may be cutting edge, perhaps beautiful, even transcendent to one person, may seem an abhorrent sensual assault to another. How do we know what is good, what will pass the test of time? To be blunt, we don't always know. But this is no reason to shirk our collective responsibility to think, to push, to look to the future, and to celebrate innovation and beauty in every form.

We can no more assure success in the design realm than we can in the stock market. Perhaps, though, we might trust our design decisions to acknowledged design professionals as we trust our money to financial professionals, and over the span of time, more often than not, we will profit.

Of course, the city is different than a financial

instrument, and is a city in which people live and work and play everyday the right forum for such risk and experimentation?

Yes. We must take chances. Great, not to mention good, architecture is always a reflection of its time, both technically and intellectually, otherwise it is stagnant, even pastiche. Cities are living entities that grow and change, they are a reflection of the world surrounding them.

Now, such a thought does not sit well in many quarters, and the view from oh-so-cute San Francisco is particularly jaded. In this city which loves itself to no end, Victorian styles that emerged from expedient pattern books in the 19th century are insinuated in nearly every new building. New and modern buildings are decried as ugly and out of character. And, in the downtown, a well-intentioned requirement that buildings have articulated tops has led to a skyline marked by silly hats. Design review is arbitrary and, as a result, design decisions and architecture are entangled in neighborhood politics with no regard to aesthetic value.

The clear lesson from San Francisco in this context is that good design has little to do with politics and should be far removed. To implement the pro-

posed New York waiver program will require no small amount of political will for it will entail releasing waiver decisions from the political realm to the very subjective world of design.

And, this is where it should reside. A broad spectrum design commission with architects, artists, and urban designers (politicians need not apply), all professionals and all practitioners noted in their fields, should be left alone to make informed decisions, to take risks and challenge orthodoxies if need be. Vision, beauty, and wonder should be encouraged and rewarded. Such is the legacy of any great city.

– EVAN ROSE

Evan Rose is a senior associate with Simon Martin-Vegue Winkelstein Moris in San Francisco and was formerly senior urban designer for that city's planning department.

TWO NEWS STORIES that broke one day in late September frame Commissioner Rose's plans to introduce aesthetic judgment into the city's zoning process, and suggest why that idea would best be forgotten.

In the first story, splashed in *The Post* under the headline "Art Attack," Mayor Giuliani threatened to cut funding from The Brooklyn Museum if it proceeds with plans to show the work of those young British artists who sometimes veer to pig chopping and excrement smearing in their pursuit of beauty. Giuliani would add New York to that list of cities – Cincinnati, Washington, D.C. – where government dictates what we experience in art. His motive? "It offends me."

Note the pronoun. In a city where public bureaucracy can be dominated by personal whim, why would we introduce a layer of official taste between the possibilities of an empty lot and the promise of the skyline? Imagine the reaction to a building that petitions for extra floors, but adds some convention-busting effect. Would it shock the panel into censorship? Decisions on art – yes, I'm being generous by throwing our architecture in with it – should be left to chance: artists doing what they do, where they will, as best they can. The check of the bottom line and the balance of public taste are just part of that game. Who in government would you trust to bend the rules?

In the second news story, Donald Trump

announced plans to display sculpture from the city's museums in the plaza of his newly-purchased General Motors Building. It was, of course, Trump's latest residential tower that inflamed the mandarins of Beekman Place and got this debate rolling. At GM, as if stealing a march on the city, he's learning to placate with art. But Trump builds as he builds, and no incentives will give him, nor anyone else, good taste. There is even the likelihood, given the weight of the dollar in this city, that developers will screw with a system of aesthetic review the way they have learned to abduct air rights and diddle plaza bonuses. Who in the private sector would you trust not to bend the rules?

Ugly buildings, mean buildings, bad buildings: all are right honest products of the city – what the market will bear – and New York can bear a great many of them. One reason to support a design review panel would be to savor the ingenuity used to soothe that body, and the new breed of freakish buildings that would result.

In Union Square there is an example of one such freak, a giant new facade sculpture called "Metronome." Since it began to belch its long-promised column of steam earlier this month, I actually find it rather charming, but it does seem to be generally abhorred; it has already earned, for its central distinguishing feature, an unflattering nickname: "The Orifice." Bad art? Maybe, but we should welcome this – and all – touches of the surreal within the potent equalizing monotony of the grid. It hasn't ruined anything. And as Union Square absorbs "Metronome" as part of a grander pageant, Beekman Place could quietly endure shadows as the price for dynamism, and the mayor might begin to tolerate difference as a trade-off for governing this magnificent and reliably resilient city. Who would I trust to shape New York? Only the city itself.

– PHILIP NOBEL

Philip Nobel is a New York-based freelance writer.

I BELIEVE THAT exemption for buildings of "exceptional design" could certainly work if the new body responsible for conferring this status were comprised of informed professionals with the appropriate backgrounds.

These sort of decisions need to be made by

museum curators or architects who teach. It is for these professionals to determine what exceptional design is. Architects in private practice don't have the training or experience in critical discussion, nor perhaps the distance.

People who teach in the city's leading schools of architecture, like Columbia, should serve on such a panel. They know how to think about and analyze such subjects. People who write about architecture critically should be included as well. New York's overall review process works well if we take the Seagram Building as an example. At Four Seasons, the current owners of the building, TIAA pension fund, did not want the restaurant space classified as a landmark. They protested as they felt that the future of the space would be forever determined for them and challenged the Landmarks Preservation Commission's designation of the space in 1989. The appeal was therefore brought before the Board of Estimate [the board was eliminated in 1990] who confirmed that it should be classified a landmark. This was a good process, there were public hearings before the Landmarks Preservation Commission, a body composed of representatives from various disciplines, and a right of appeal. In Montreal, we could benefit from the more democratic components already in place in New York's review process – the opportunity for citizens to be involved through community board meetings. Under our last mayor we were able to hold similar public hearings, but not now.

However, this process doesn't work for art. I think it is very important to simply have an art commission for public art. In Québec, the 1% for Art project works wonderfully. A commission, composed of representatives of the public, artists, clients and people with a critical position in art, comprises the jury that will choose the individual works. Again, these critical thinkers need to be related to institutions. You can't pick people willy-nilly. Commissions or panels that are formed of private individuals cannot work. People should be selected from contemporary art departments and museums. In New York, that would mean curators at the Museum of Modern Art, P. S. 1, etc.

Artwork for private buildings must be chosen in the same way, by professionals whose responsibility is critical analysis of works of art. The clause governing maintenance of the Seagram Building requires that artwork placed from time to time on the Seagram Plaza must be approved by a representative of MoMA. Philip Johnson has acted in that capacity.

At times errors are made in judging scale and quality, but it is through these experiences that both the artists and the jurors learn. To be always right is stultifying – it is essential to push the boundaries beyond what is considered safe or acceptable, beyond the status quo.

– PHYLLIS LAMBERT

Phyllis Lambert is the founding director and chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Canadian Centre for Architecture.

MERITORIOUS ARCHITECTURAL FORM has been used as a lever to extract maximum entitlement advantage from municipal authorities nationwide. Yet, uniqueness in American Architecture since the 1950s has been synonymous with the anti-urban, personal modernist project visions of star architects.

At an increasing pace, zoning paired with project-focused architectural design has been used by developers and their architects for personal advantage and to the detriment of the public good. The instrument that was meant to guarantee order in urban development has become the means of destabilizing the form of cities nationwide.

Never has there existed such a gulf between the values of the architectural elite of this country and the taste of the classes that are the regulators and consumers of their Architecture. Never has there been such a distrust of developers and their motives. The two are crucially related and are feeding the truly irrational and onerous public process regulating development.

The New Urbanism has been defined as a movement to reclaim urban centers and to contain peripheral sprawl. Central to the new urbanist agenda is the development of coherent towns and cities that are both public space-centered and possess a continuous fabric of buildings. A new definition of codes and coding is necessary in order to accomplish such a vision of urban development and redevelopment.

New urbanist codes take an entirely different approach to the matter of controlling urban form. What is valued above all else is the ability of individual buildings to be active participants in generating great places in the city. What is regulated from the beginning is the urban and ecological form of the city itself. And not in the "one shoe fits all" manner of

zoning, but rather by taking into account the specific character of neighborhoods, districts and corridors unique to each city.

The regulation of the urban behavior of buildings is obligatory. Further regulation through style is optional. In certain settings style can be prescribed. In others it can be free. In certain places, working with traditional architectural languages, including the modern, may be required. Other places may promote variety and encourage personal experimentation in design.

New urbanist development codes demand an explicit response by individual projects to a small number of fundamental issues of urban design: building typology, building placement, parking, service, building envelope, thresholds, ground floor. The form of the city comes about by the constancy, repetition, and variety of every project's response to this narrow set of coding provisions.

Style by itself can never be used as an excuse for skirting new urbanist regulations. If individual developments can prove that they are exceptional contributors to the fabric of buildings, character of open space and landscape framework specific to their city, then entitlement exceptions may be considered. What are the grounds for such exceptions? Even better contributions to urban and ecological form, not stylistic pyrotechnics.

– STEFANOS POLYZOIDES

Stefanos Polyzoides is a partner in Moule & Polyzoides, Architects and Urbanists, in Pasadena, CA, and a co-founder of the Congress for the New Urbanism.

SEATTLE can serve as one model for New York as it determines an exemption process for "exceptional design." If the question of greater height and bulk in trade for "great beauty" were posed in Seattle, I speculate the process would be as follows. The City Council and mayor would ask the Seattle Design Commission, the Downtown Neighborhood Design Review Board and the Planning Commission to lead an advisory group of stakeholders representing a city-wide constituency. In a series of public workshops, presentations and discussions would focus on the existing code, the new downtown neighborhood comprehensive plan, and the existing pieces of an urban design plan. National models, evaluation criteria and

shared aspirations for the downtown would be reviewed. This activity would be lead by citizens and staffed by the newly established Design Center.

The result of this public discussion would be twofold. A long-needed downtown urban design plan would be funded. A public process for project evaluation would be implemented, guided by the aspirations and principles of the downtown comprehensive plan, a new urban design plan, and the tools provided by the code. The prudent method for introducing such values in the development of the downtown would not be limited to the zoning code, but would structure a broad discussion of environmental and urban design issues. The evaluation mechanism would be a joint committee of the Seattle Design Commission and the Downtown Design Review Board. The public review would involve a sequence of presentations starting early in project development.

For thirty years, the Seattle Design Commission has reviewed all projects in the public realm. As an advisory body, the commission is able to freely discuss the range of issues influencing the development of an urban environment and proactively advise the council and mayor. In the 1990s, the Neighborhood Design Review program was established to review private projects of specific types, consider code departures and more closely fit a project with its context. The commission and review boards periodically work in concert to develop a balanced discussion on urban development, allowing departures from the code in the context of a more global discussion of environmental design issues.

If this discussion on "great beauty" were to occur in Seattle now, it would occur in the context of a heightened interest in urban development. Seattle neighborhoods have recently completed a grass-roots neighborhood planning effort (37 plans). The downtown core is alive with people. Hundreds of citizens attend the lectures associated with the selection of architects for the new city hall, the new libraries and the aquarium. Conversations on the corner result in sophisticated land use and environmental discussions. The skill with civic discourse suggests a community which could have this discussion and produce tools to manage height, bulk and beauty, maybe the best result of years of the "Seattle process."

– BARBARA SWIFT

Landscape architect Barbara Swift is the past Chair of the Seattle Design Commission.

UPDATE

11.99 >

This fall the Institute's programs continue to explore the question posed in this Van Alen Report: **IS PUBLIC SPACE DEAD?** On Tuesday, November 9 at 6:30 P.M. the question will be thrown out for public debate. Presenters for this panel discussion include *Feed* (www.feedmag.com) Editor-in-Chief Steven Johnson, Harvard professor and chronicler of New York's "private public spaces" Jerold Kayden, and Internet thinker and author of *The Control Revolution* Andrew Shapiro.

On Monday, November 22 at 6:30 P.M. design critic and author Jan Abrams will speak about the changing definition of public experience. Abrams will moderate presentations by architect Kadambari Baxi and interactive media artist Antonio Muntadas, whose projects look at the intersection of public, private and virtual space. Baxi will present Martin/Baxi Architect's *Entropy Project*, a digitally-based investigation where architecture is excerpted from its historical context and systematically reformatted to create new, synthetic realities. Muntadas, whose recent works includes *On Translation: The Internet Project* (adaweb.walkerart.org/influx/muntadas/) an exploration on communication, will present *Protected Space/Public Space*.

Almost 200 entries from 72 countries have been received for the competition **ARCHITECTURE FOR HUMANITY**. The goal of the competition is to develop transitional housing solutions for refugees in the wake of the recent conflict in Kosovo. The jury is comprised of architects Steven Holl, Billie Tsien and Tod Williams, as well as relief experts Elise Storck of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and Herb Sturz of the Open Society Institute.

Organized by the relief organization War Child USA and New York firm Christidis Lauster Radu Architects, the competition was launched by activist Bianca Jagger at the Institute this summer. The organizers intend to build prototypes of the premiated submissions. The winners will be announced at the opening of an exhibition of selected entries at the Van Alen Institute on November 11 at 6:30 P.M. Entries will also be shown at USAID headquarters in Washington, DC; the French Institute of Architecture, Paris; Royal Institute of British Architects, London; and at locations in Amsterdam, The Netherlands; Bucharest, Romania; and Venice, Italy. For more information see (www.archforhumanity.com). Those interested in contributing financially to the effort should call War Child at 212.614.3154.

TRUSTEES OF VAN ALEN INSTITUTE

Peter Wolf *Chairman*
Leslie Gill *First Vice-Chair*
Kevin Lippert *Second Vice-Chair*
Richard Gluckman *Treasurer*
Mary Miss *Secretary*
Paola Antonelli
Diana Balmori
Kadambari Baxi
Byron Bell
M. Christine Boyer
Robert F. Fox, Jr.
Mildred Friedman
Marian Starr Imperatore
Robert E. Kupiec
Michael A. Manfredi
Sherida E. Paulsen
Susan T. Rodriguez
Andrew Ross

INSTITUTE STAFF

Executive Director
Raymond Gastil

Associate Director for Programs
Casey L. Jones

Publications Associate
Bay Brown

Program & Administration
China Blue
Nathaniel H. Brooks
Arif Durokovic
Yeol Grant
Bruno Kurz

THE INSTITUTE GRATEFULLY ACKNOWLEDGES ITS SUPPORTERS:

GRANTORS: The Stephen A. and Diana L. Goldberg Foundation, Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts, Harvard University Graduate School of Design, The New York State Council on the Arts, The New York Times Foundation.

PATRONS: Architecture Magazine, Turner Construction Company.

SUSTAINING BENEFACTORS: Leslie Gill, Gluckman Mayner Architects, Peter T. Joseph Foundation, Kupiec Koutsomitis Architects, National Reprographics, Polshek Partnership, Susan T. Rodriguez, Peter M. Wolf.

BENEFACTORS: Ambassador Construction Company, Balmori Associates, Columbia University Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation, The Decorators Club, Robert F. Fox, Jr., Mildred and Martin Friedman, Gwathmey Siegel & Associates, Marian Starr Imperatore, Kohn Pedersen Fox Associates, Costas Kondylis & Associates, Köneman... Ellipsis, Landscape Forms, Kevin C. Lippert and Julie V. Iovine, NY Waterway, PM Contracting Company, Princeton Architectural Press, Pesce, Ltd., Brooke Kamin Rapaport and Richard A. Rapaport, Rice University School of Architecture, Weiss/Manfredi Architects.

SUSTAINING CONTRIBUTORS: American Planning Association Metro Chapter, Paola Antonelli, Bell-Larson Architects & Planners, The Competition Project, Esto Photographics, Mary Miss, Netherlands Design Institute, New York Building Congress, Andrew Ross, Ryall Porter Architects, Elizabeth Barlow Rogers, Studio L'Image, Karen Van Lengen, The Widder Foundation.