

# URBAN

The Art of Planning

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Are you a left-brain person or a right-brain person? Do you walk the paved road of logic or dance through the wild flower fields of your imagination? Do you recite multiplication tables or murmur Walt Whitman when you need to relax? Are you frustrated by this line of questioning or bored out of your bifurcated mind? Both? Good.

It's little wonder that the popular myth about the split personality of the human brain grew out of research in the 1960s, a time that also witnessed the reign of "rational planning" and its formulaic ilk. These days, scientists know that the distinction between our supposed logical and creative sides is much more subtle, that functions are shared and complementary, and that the mutually exclusive model is all-around false.

We here at URBAN believe that the same applies to the study and practice of planning. Logical or arty? Tomayto, tomahto! If there is one discipline where logic, pattern, and strategy get cozy with spatial perception, philosophy, and the "big picture," then planning is surely it. This issue is therefore dedicated to the Art of Planning – the creatively logical risk-taking of today's planning generation.

This semester's contributors can testify to the fact that creative planning has always had to pick its battles. Several of our distinguished professors give their take on the art of planning in our "Ask a Pro-fessor" segment. In the Spring 2007 Studio Round-Up, you can read about the encounter between first-year planning students and the demands of the real world. You'll also find Roe's wake-up call to the powers that be ("Toward a National Planning Agenda..."), and take a trip to the contested Old Town of Tbilisi, Georgia, in Maisuradze's "Letter from Georgia Republic." And you'll get to know the shiny, happy faces of Columbia's Urban Planning masters students in the annual student biography presentation.

Above all, no matter which side you lean toward, never forget to lean on your fellow urbanists for ideas and inspiration. Two hemispheres are better than one.

Imaginatively yours,

The URBAN Editors

## Editors

### **Jezra Thompson** - *Layout Editor*

Approached this issue from the perspective of a once-graffiti artist in Los Angeles in the mid-90's. She found inspiration in the grit and glamor of the City and drew from her creative experiences as a planner, architect, designer, and artist.

### **Leigh Harvey** - *Theme Editor*

A creative type with a propensity for calculus and all things techie, Leigh was eager to explore the contrast between the art and the science of planning in this issue. She hopes to encourage planners to employ bold and artful initiatives that will re-invent a new, improved urban landscape.

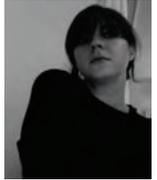
### **Minna Ninova** - *General Editor*

Her Grace is all she has/And that, so vast displays/One Art, to recognize, must be/Another Art to praise. --- *Emily Dickinson*

## Thanks to....

The URBAN editors would like to recognize the following students for their outstanding contribution to the production of this semester's magazine:

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Michelle Tabet  
Pixie Alexander  
Preeti Sodhi  
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Therese Diede  
Youngji Bae



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# LETTER FROM GEORGIA REPUBLIC

## Why renovation through eviction is anything but good news for Old Tbilisi

**BY Alex Maisuradze**

The Tbilisi city government is proposing to increase the land tax in historic districts of the Capital as a temporary measure to help finance preservation projects. This initiative has caused massive public outrage because the residents of these predominantly lower-income neighborhoods fear a tax hike will make these districts unaffordable, thus pricing them out en masse.

Walking through its narrow cobble-stoned streets and meandering lanes, one wonders how Tbilisi's Old Town survived the merciless hand of Soviet planners who razed entire neighborhoods to make way for wider streets, highways, and concrete public housing complexes of questionable taste. The City nevertheless survived, and the Old Town was designated as an historic district in 1975. Thanks to the decree, much of its character was preserved but little has been done to restore decaying landmarks.

Serving as a capital since 458 AD, the Old Town is Tbilisi's traditional center. Situated at the crossroads of the Great Silk Route, the City became a melting pot for Asian and European cultural influences. This heritage is evident in the City's architecture, much of which was subjected to the destructive whims of invaders, the last of which came from Persia. The surviving structures were built in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and exhibit an eclectic mix of Art Nouveau, Neoclassical, and Renaissance revival. Spiral staircases winding up along ornamental facades to vine-covered wooden balconies, Persian archways, delicate masonry patterns and cast-iron gates, leafy parks and courtyards with the distant ring of church bells, and an occasional call from a street vendor selling either *matsoni* (yogurt) or *marozhni* (ice-cream) all take you a couple of centuries back.



Photograph by Alex Maisuradze

Having survived Soviet Planning, the greatest threat to Tbilisi's Old Town is now decay and neglect. Three century-old *caravanserais*, where Silk Road traders once gathered, are now occupied by squatters and refugees. Only a brick carcass remains from another one nearby. The area, spread over several hundred acres, is home to thousands of families. Many are poor, but some residents are young professionals who have taken upon themselves the task of fixing up old buildings, and are opening restaurants, cafés, boutiques and art galleries. But the efforts to adapt and reuse these structures have so far only had a marginal effect on the overall state of decay of the Old Town.

Acknowledging the great redevelopment potential of the area, the city government is proposing an additional land tax for the historic district in order to generate funds for preservation projects which will, according to the Mayor, improve infrastructure, the streets and the aesthetic appeal of the Old Town. Through an active renovation and restoration policy, the Mayor aims to attract tourists and businesses and induce an increase in property values, supposedly to the advantage of its residents.

This is not how many residents of the Old Town see it. For the majority of the households in the area living below subsistence levels, a 30-fold increase in land tax, no matter how small it may seem in absolute terms, could lead to the mass relocation of inner-city dwellers to other less expensive neighborhoods, far from the center.

Historically, the Old Town consisted of mixed-income households. Fishermen, carpenters and merchants lived side-by-side with artists, civil servants, and the minor bourgeoisie of Tbilisi. Thanks to almost symbolic artificially low land taxes and fees, the diverse nature



Photograph by Alex Maisuradze

of the Old Town was preserved throughout Soviet times. This arrangement promoted a sense of camaraderie and equity, and facilitated community bonding. Most families have lived here for generations and actively contribute to the unique charm that the City is so proud of.

For many decades, Tbilisi functioned without land markets, as did the majority of other socialist cities. Land was nationalized and administratively allocated (rather than subjected to market instruments), which had a profound impact on the internal organization of the City. The absence of land prices removed all incentives to redevelop built-up areas, the land was never recycled and without price signals, developers preferred the simplicity of developing at the periphery to redeveloping central areas with obsolete land uses. To estimate land tax, the values of land were calculated based on weighted coefficients representing amenities such as transport, infrastructure, and environmental quality. Since demand factors were not included, these estimates were highly arbitrary.

Urban land markets are expected to raise the efficiency of the post-socialist city, but what happens during the transition is alarming. For seven decades, planners made urban investment decisions under these conditions: land had no site value, interest on capital was not recognized, energy prices were a small fraction of world prices, and cash wages had no relation to the marginal productivity of labor. The emergence of markets led to sharp shifts in relative prices. Real estate prices have soared, passing the six-digit mark some time ago. Low maintenance costs have, until now, allowed the current owners to remain in their old homes despite financial hardship, but by the same token, jeopardize the health of the structures which are now literally caving in on their inhabitants. The medium-to-low-densities which constitute the great appeal of the Old Town actually act as a disadvantage in the face of the tax increase proposal – the tax share of each household is determined by the ground floor surface occupied by that household which is larger in lower density developments than in higher-rise apartment blocks.

If enforced, the proposal to increase the land tax could further contribute to the process of household income segregation that is already starting to change the inclusive character of Georgia's capital. Through a decade of buying and selling, wealthier citizens are being relocated to the inner city districts,

while the poor are being forced to the outskirts, thus exacerbating the income contrasts between the inner city and suburbs. As lower income households relocate to the outer districts, the latter become stigmatized and increasingly isolated from the rest of society.

The government faces a real dilemma: either passively watches the historic structures of the Old Town fade away into the pages of history books, or voluntarily induces gentrification through higher land taxes and associated land value appreciation at the expense of the authentic neighborhood character. The city government will have to choose from these two sub-par options, but does this mean it has exhausted all other alternatives? A more equitable way must exist.

**Editor's note:** Alex is currently exploring more equitable solutions for the future of Old Tbilisi as part of his master's thesis research.

# LETTER FROM UGANDA

When it comes to planning, the West doesn't always know best

BY Nasozi Kakembo



Photograph by Nasozi Kakembo

This article is inspired by my recent trip to Kampala, Uganda in the summer of 2007. I was astonished to witness the extent to

which *local* planning efforts had changed the urban landscape. Kampala is undergoing an extensive urban transformation and it has been host to numerous planning conferences of late, including the East African Physical Planners Conference titled *The Dawn of Effective Urban Planning in the Great Lakes Region: Skills, Capacity Building, and Agenda for Action*. The din of development was the soundtrack to my Ugandan sojourn—steamrollers, jackhammers, and power saws constantly reminding me that Kampala was alive. Yet as loud as these were, many of us in the West do not hear them.

Western media, international affairs “experts” and academia have failed to do justice to the people of Africa, neglecting to observe their involvement in resolving the development issues that they confront daily. News reports and magazines dedicate entire issues to Africa, only to lionize Western multilateral institutions and their “unprecedented” efforts to aid the continent. According to news media, various publications, and a recent barrage of ad campaigns, the few protagonists in development are western NGOs, US and EU aid and relief agencies, international banks, and celebrities. This bias is harmful to western urban planning students and professionals because it engenders the basis for incongruous planning interventions, overlooking the very people our efforts are aimed to help, and dismissing *why* the issues exist in the first place. Images of shantytowns, water queues, and sick or starving families fill our lecture halls and conference rooms from afar. Certainly these images do their part to convey the harsh reality that many Africans face. But these images are one-dimensional, and this perspective deprives the appetites of planning professionals and students enthusiastic about international affairs and development. By

examining successful cases of African development by Africans, western scholars and professionals can attempt to understand the roots of the problems in Africa, and improve the planning models they create to address them.

When I visited my family in Kampala four years ago, the town's lack of infrastructure was very apparent. There was one traffic light “working” in the center of town. (And by “working,” I mean that it flashed arbitrarily all day and night.) When I returned this past summer, roads were being repaved, potholes filled, and traffic signals (plural) were not only operational, they were being obeyed. The level of activity was overwhelming. As a planning student, I had to know what had prompted this sudden development and how it happened so quickly. A family member informed me that it was the result of, what Ugandans refer to as, “CHOGM fever.” CHOGM fever is not another deleterious viral epidemic, but a recent catalyst of urban development in Uganda. CHOGM stands for the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting. It is a biennial Commonwealth Nations' summit held to discuss global and Commonwealth issues, and to establish collective policies and initiatives.<sup>1</sup> Expected to bring in hordes of guests from at least 53 countries around world, a lot of work had to be done to accommodate the influx. In response, Parliament began a City Beautification Movement to assure a safe and successful visit for the delegates and Ugandans participating in the event. This is not the result of a World Bank initiative or an OECD consensus, but of the work of the Ugandan people.

The African Development Bank was established in 1964 on the principle of Africa “taking charge of itself.” It is now the premier finance development institution on the continent.<sup>2</sup> The Bank recently celebrated a new water and sanitation project in Mpigi town, Uganda. This project aims to bring safe drinking water to this small town (population 19,000), and to six other rural communities. The African Development Bank is also financing roughly 20% of the \$750 million dollar Bujagali Power Project. The Bujagali Power Project will produce an abundant supply of clean, renewable energy for Ugandan homes and businesses upon its completion, slated for 2010.<sup>3</sup> The Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) is

another partial financier in the construction of the 250mW micro hydropower project in Jinga, Uganda. The AKDN is the world's largest private development agency and it has been an important part of Ugandan and East African history since the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>4</sup> Today, Uganda is home to some of the Aga Khan's most ambitious business and development enterprises. Many institutions of higher education, hotel and tourism projects, and power plants carry the AKDN brand.

As an intern at the Clinton Global Initiative, I had the opportunity to sit in on several of the plenaries and working sessions at the organization's annual meeting in September. Some of the world's wealthiest individuals made commitments to address particular issues in one of four focus areas: Poverty Alleviation, Global Health, Environment, and Education. Among these altruists were Shakira, Jessica Biel, Brad Pitt, and Angelina Jolie. In a gesture not common to most international development conferences, lesser known activists like Dikembe Mutombo, Dr. Wangari Maathai, and Valentino Achak Deng shared the spotlight with the notorious "A-list" roster. Dikembe Mutombo is more than the 7'2" NBA Defensive Player of the Year. In 2001, the eponymous Dikembe Mutombo Foundation began construction on a hospital and research center in his home country of Congo.<sup>5</sup> Kenyan Dr. Wangari Maathai received the 2004 Nobel Peace Prize, and is the first African woman to hold this distinction. Her Green Belt Movement, commenced in 1977, provides income and sustenance to millions of Kenyans through the planting of trees.<sup>6</sup> A survivor of civil war atrocities and a Sudanese refugee, Valentino Achak Deng has created an awareness and advocacy organization on behalf of the continuing conflict in the Sudan.<sup>7</sup>

This is not meant to be an encyclopedic assessment of the personal stories of these activists; it is my hope that this information will provoke further investigation into the work being done by those who do not grace the covers of tabloids. These were the actors in African development before it became fashionable, these are the activists who should be celebrated and studied in our seminars and lecture halls.

The victories I have highlighted are not exceptions to the rule in Africa, but part of a widespread phenomenon. Current urban development in Uganda is precipitated by the need to clean up for the CHOGM, but it is indicative of a more sustained homegrown capability. Ugandans and Africans to the north, south and in the Sahara; to the east and west of the Nile; and even in the Niger Delta are mobilized at all levels.



Photographs by Nasozi Kakembo

Development remains a moot point openly discussed among Ugandans. They know they are the solution to their own problems because they have survived the ravages of colonialism and war, and are not resigned to sitting back and waiting for Western handouts. As planning experts educated in the West, we ought to exhibit genuine deference to the average Ugandan who works day in and day out to make their home a better place. International efforts are failing continuously because they fail to understand the root cause of many of the problems in Africa.

Many experts completely disregard the urban, social, and economic stability that prevailed prior to colonialism. These "experts" assert technical diagnoses without analyzing pre-colonial African history. Until members of the international development community understand Africa's rich past and acknowledge the reality and legitimacy of its current assets, we will not only continue to wrongly and presumptuously perceive African development as *our* burden, but our earnest efforts will continue to achieve only mediocre success.

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# HELLO MOTO!

BY Stephanie Lim

**I left my heart in San Francisco.** I never thought I could love someone like Betsy. She was dangerous. She was fast. She was irritable, loud, and a little high-maintenance. But she was also 25 years old and beautiful, so I could forgive her these things. Most importantly, we traveled together well – so well that after a while, I couldn't imagine going anywhere without her. Going places with Betsy was infinitely more fun than going alone.

A lot of people didn't like Betsy. Even though she made me incredibly happy, they thought she was likely to get me killed and they begged me to get rid of her. I'm not going to lie, we had some frightening moments. But I can honestly say it was never Betsy's fault. After all, she was just a motorcycle.

If you're like my parents, you equate motorcycle ownership with organ donation. Statistically, you'd have a point. Per vehicle miles traveled, a person is about 20 times more likely to die on a motorcycle than in a car.<sup>1</sup> If you're even more like my parents, this is the figure you cite at the end of every conversation. Of course, you are also 21 times more likely to die on a horse than on a motorcycle, and I didn't see them trying to pull me off Old Thunder in summer camp.<sup>2</sup> However, horses are moody creatures – literally – which enters another risk variable into the equation. Motorcycles and cars don't have this kind of unpredictability, where human error is the leading cause of accidents. In the motorcycle world, the humans making the errors are usually the riders themselves. It's not the motorcycles that are dangerous – it's the *motorcyclists*.

In the past decade, rider demographic trends have begun to reflect an unfortunate blend of inexperience, poor judgment, and increasing engine size, coupled with more recreational use. More and more, older men (90 percent of motorcyclists are men) are purchasing extremely powerful motorcycles as recreational vehicles. These guys are inexperienced, aging baby boomers crashing overkill cruisers into highway dividers after a long Sunday spent knocking back pitchers at some rural roadhouse. And this isn't just an unsupported burn against wannabe bikers. More than half of all motorcycle fatalities are single-vehicle



Collage by Stephanie Lim

**In the motorcycle world, the humans making the errors are usually the riders themselves. It's not the motorcycles that are dangerous – it's the motorcyclists.**

collisions with a fixed object; more than half of all fatalities occur on rural roads; and 72 percent of new members to the ever-popular boomer vehicular suicide club (40 percent of fatalities and rising) are drunk when they join.<sup>3</sup> Apparently, the new way to end your mid-life crisis is to buy an expensive chrome coffin, and drive it, tanked, into a tree.<sup>4</sup> Automobile drivers are not much different in terms of drunk driving, with the only difference being that drunk automobile drivers are much more likely to kill others in the process of killing themselves.

I don't want to see motorcycling become as outmoded as horseback riding, and it's not accurate to say that motorcycles—and bicycles and horses—are dangerous without examining the nature of these fatality rates. Certain people will find ways to kill themselves no matter how they travel.

So, if you're considering upgrading to two-wheeled travel, don't let the statistics get you down. The best two ways to stay alive and upright are to (1) not be a drunken idiot, and (2) to encourage as many people as you can to join you, making the streets safer for everyone, including pedestrians. And if joining the two-wheeled revolution for green's sake isn't enough, consider all the glorious moments of smug superiority that are so hard to come by in congested urban environments. That smug feeling comes when you fly free through the toll plaza and weave through Bay Bridge traffic in rush hour traffic, when you hear people sighing as they insert their credit card at the gas pump as you get change back from your ten-dollar fill, when you can keep an eye on your sweet ride parked directly in front of the café while your buddies run up breathlessly from the spot they found a half-mile away after circling the neighborhood for hours, and, best of all, when someone you hardly know asks for a ride home and you say, sweetly, "Got a helmet?"

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# ME AND BLOOMBERG DOWN BY THE SCHOOLYARD

**BY Kasey LaFlam**

What's that you say, Mayor Bloomberg? You want every New Yorker to be within a ten-minute walk of a park by 2030? Most would say that it can't be done unless the City does something unusual, like, say, unlocking the gates of nearly 290 public school playgrounds across the five boroughs. Well, it just so happens that the Bloomberg administration plans to do just that. This endeavor does not come without controversy, however. Who will ultimately be responsible for the maintenance of the City's schoolyards? Who will determine the rules of these new open spaces and, more importantly, who will enforce them? While this initiative is already underway, questions remain. Where are the answers? Well, they're underway too.

The City's initiative to ensure that all New Yorkers have equal access to quality open space is being coordinated with the Trust for Public Land's (TPL) *Parks for People* program. TPL is a non-profit organization committed to preserving land to be used for playgrounds, community gardens, and historic sites. The City has committed to match two dollars to every one dollar that TPL raises for the complete renovation of some 25 school playgrounds. The spaces, designed by TPL, include amenities such as basketball courts, running tracks, green space, safe and healthy playing environments and, best of all, public spaces that communities can use when school is not in session.<sup>1</sup>

At the New School this September, a panel discussion entitled "Opening the Schoolyard Gates: Reclaiming Urban Community Space," used Sunset Park in Brooklyn as the poster child for what a revitalized park could offer to the local school and to the community. Before the City released PlaNYC, a group of concerned staff members at the Center for Family Life in Sunset Park, a community organization affiliated with PS 503/506 (formerly known as PS 314), had recognized the need to provide the community and its at-risk youth with safe public space.<sup>2</sup> Reclaiming park space riddled with gang activity after dark was a major challenge for the Sunset Park community. In 1999, with the assistance of a grant, the Center for Family Life was able to purchase new basketball hoops, obtain computer and video equipment for evening classes, and hire evening staff between the hours of 4pm and 8pm to monitor activity in the park and run family-focused programs. As a result of this initiative, today the park is filled with community members of all ages at all hours. The park has different amenities and separate space for different types of park-goers, but these

separate spaces have been designed to promote interconnectivity, and bring together young and old in a shared reclamation of precious and scarce urban open space.

The City and its communities must overcome many potential pitfalls when retrofitting urban open space. There is still much discussion about who will be responsible for maintaining and monitoring new community open space. Should it be the responsibility of the park service or the school custodial staff to clean up the empty coffee cups, broken beer bottles, and cigarette butts that could litter schoolyards as a result of increased public access? Some would argue that if the parks had supervision, those items would not be left behind in the first place. But who or what organization should be responsible for monitoring these newly opened spaces, and for how much time each day? Will the park be open through the night, or will supervisors lock the gates at 8pm when they leave? Will certain users be prevented from using the open space at night? These are just some of the questions that many neighborhoods will have to answer if and when schools open their gates to the public.

Despite these important logistical questions, the potential benefits of opening these 290 schoolyards after school are immeasurable. Providing children and their families with a place to play helps enhance the quality of life for *everyone* in the community. And converting schoolyards into public park space is an excellent use of existing resources. With the right financing, the sharing of space (school by day, park by night) could potentially improve the schoolyards, leaving them better off than they were before public evening use. And we're not just talking benches and basketball hoops; many of these open space renovations contain interesting architectural elements, intricate landscape designs, and vibrantly colored playground equipment. This creates an inviting and habitable atmosphere for *all* members of the community. Surely, this is an endeavor well worth the time and consideration of *all* members of the planning community.

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# TOWARD A NATIONAL PLANNING

**One of our authors sacrifices a few moments of class time to think about the nation's future. We hope Washington (and the American Planning Association) is paying attention.**

**BY Matthew Roe**

In the next few years, this Congress and the next President will have an opportunity to alter the economic, social, and political landscapes of the United States for as much as a decade. Here's a set of planning-related tasks that should be at the top of Congress' to-do list. Some are easier than others. But dozens of federal agencies and programs already affect planning, often at cross-purposes and with remarkable dysfunction: the Environmental Protection Agency, the Department of Housing and Urban Development, and the Bureau of Land Management; the Departments of Transportation, Energy, Defense, and Education; and at times even the Drug Enforcement Administration have been involved in land-use decisions. The result has been a series of maddeningly – if not criminally – misplaced incentives built into federal and state policies, leading to increasingly antisocial actions by the shapers of our landscape: a big-box store passes environmental review by widening a road; suburban towns and school districts achieve solvency through exclusionary zoning; and developers comply with impermeable-surface restrictions by building large-lot subdivisions.

Part I: Dear Government, Please Listen.

- 1) **Create an urban policy** that links sustainable and equitable land use decisions to federal transportation funding. It's time. See the following for details.
- 2) **Create a rural policy.** Eliminate all or most agribusiness price supports, i.e. stop paying farmers not to grow things. Then, to simplify grossly, stop paying corn farmers to grow corn. Use all that cash for something better, like rural/farmland preservation near growing urban areas, or to get more varied food to the poorest Americans. Set performance goals – say, for the environmental impact of new development – and compel states to meet them at the risk of losing transportation dollars if they don't.
- 3) **Rework the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).** As either laundry lists of user-unfriendly data or – at worst – whitewashed accounts of developers' purported largesse, Environmental Impact Statements (EIS) have become a tool of delay rather than decision. Besides being piecemeal, the process tends to favor larger, less openly planned projects. In most states, the EIS process also punishes developments that expand local roadway capacity. The impact statement should instead be built into a comprehensive

model, detailing the impacts of the project on the municipality's triple bottom line - equity, environment, and economy.

- 4) **Invent an alternative to takings.** Come up with a progressive alternative to eminent domain, for which Congress can pass an enabling act and the states can follow suit (i.e. something more broadly palatable.) The law should do three things: distribute much more of a project's benefit to the people and businesses being asked to move for public benefit, including rental tenants; allow broader planning around infrastructure projects; and explicitly address the role of private developers. The notion of allowing takings for private redevelopment projects involves a distinct danger of taking from the poor to give to the rich. We might instead use a process of structured negotiations and predictable compensation levels. If a developer can profit from a project, the existing users should be able to profit from it as well – otherwise, we've decided that only the very wealthiest developers can or should make money from redevelopment.

An agreement on this subject would be a triumph for planning. It would be a breakthrough for transit-oriented development and housing; a more flexible land-assembly process could allow a transit project to include publicly developed land around stations rather than relying on tax increment financing or user fees to recoup capital costs. This would allow real regional planning in the fastest-growing regions, including the suburbs that have to develop pockets of density to become sustainable.

- 5) **Make the tax code more sustainable...** The low quality of our built environment has a lot to do with the tax code. Most construction expenses can be depreciated over 30 years, so most businesses build their own headquarters to last about that long. Office computers, for example, can be fully depreciated over two years – which is why your PC probably broke at least once since you started school. Depreciation periods for most commercial construction should be lengthened, making developers think twice about building a use-once-throw-away building. This would slow some forms of development, but it would speed redevelopment and eliminate much of the bias toward greenfield development – previously underdeveloped land, restored land, agricultural properties, and parks.

**FEATURES**

# AGENDA IN TWO HOURS OR LESS

6)...and more equitable. In the tax code's relationship with housing, the big issue is the federal homeowner tax deduction (and the deduction of property taxes on income taxes.) If this subsidy on owner-occupied housing is to remain, it should be extended to renter-occupied housing: about a third of U.S. residents live in rentals, and they should have the same federal income tax deduction that homeowners are given. Or we could scrap the deduction altogether, and instead establish a deduction based on the percent of one's income spent on housing.



Photograph courtesy of Matthew Roe

7) Finally, **fund intercity rail planning** separately from Amtrak, and tie it to airport and transit planning. Airport operators can make excellent rail transit planners because they have an incentive to build rail, both for increased connection to airports for long flights, and for relief from short flights within a mega-region. Transit agencies have an obvious interest in rail to other cities, and if it's going to work, intercity rail will need the kinds of connections it has in the Northeast, where "direct to downtown" means a connection to transit service.

Part II: The Transportation Bill –"TEA time is over!"

Despite its love of unfunded mandates, Congress has been far too shy to use its massive project funding (read: the transportation bill) as a carrot to direct local governments. But national coordination has been accomplished in the past on such issues as speed limits and drunk driving through what amounts to strings attached to highway funding. Why not tie transportation funding to sustainable, equitable land use practices? Besides, I dare you to find a development whose materials and labor are entirely sourced from within one state. (Constitutionality Alert: regional planning issues obviously involve interstate commerce and interstate commuting.)

A fair and goal-oriented national system of transportation project finance must be created to replace the existing earmark-reliant method of Federal funding, which greatly distorts both national priorities and national wealth distribution. This system should build regional

decision-making about infrastructure and the environment directly into the federal funding process, as the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) system intended. All local and regional project funding should be based primarily on requests from local and regional elected officials, not on earmarks by Congressional representatives; officials of each region would have to agree on funding priorities before asking Congress for funding. This would provide some incentive to form real regional governance structures, and would require regional concurrence on major infrastructure investments.

The new transportation bill – needed by the end of 2008 but probably postponed until the 2010 fiscal year – is a twice-a-decade opportunity to address infrastructure and development

at a national level. Transportation funding in the new bill should encourage much more regional control and radically better incentives for making sustainable decisions. Regions must gradually be made more important in transportation planning than state and local boundaries, and these regions must be able to set basic land use goals for their subsidiaries. Just as the "farm bill" should be reconsidered as a comprehensive rural policy bill, so too should the transportation bill be rethought of as an urban policy bill, land use included. (I can see the acronym now: the Department of Transportation, Housing, and Urban Development, or THUD.)

How might these goals be built into a transportation bill? All localities desiring capital finance in a given period (maybe two years) could be required to submit a capital budget and a realistic development plan encompassing physical and human elements, broader, more open-ended, and subject to more review than a typical "comprehensive plan". This plan would be submitted to a regional planning body, akin to a regional MPO but composed of the chief executives and top legislators of each locality in the region, not heads of planning agencies. Agreement at this regional council would be necessary for all federally financed capital expenditures in the region, not just expenditures on the planning process itself as is the case today. Thus, localities would be given the ability to determine the best solution to all local planning issues as they do now, but would be required to accomplish certain goals. Most importantly, they would be required to meet mandates built into the Bill - primarily for sustainable and equitable policies.



Image from [www.cache.eb.com](http://www.cache.eb.com)

### Part III: APA, Where Are You?

The American Planning Association (APA) has to lead the charge on some of these issues. Planners argue about what the best solution might be to a particular problem, but we agree on a lot more than we think we do. All professional organizations advocate for their members' interests, but the smart ones figure out what else they agree on. The APA obviously advocates for planners' professional interests, but it sometimes ignores the public. Planners just don't try very hard to publicize our views to non-planners, which makes it look like we don't care. But we do! Dentists actually care about people's teeth - they say so all the time by reminding us to brush and floss our teeth. Brushing might be a total scam - I wouldn't know - but nobody makes money by championing tooth decay, so nobody ever says not to brush. Lots of people make money by fighting against planning - that is, against open discussion, responsible development, and quality design. That isn't an excuse to say nothing. We must, as a profession united by common values and



Image from [www.embarqblog.wri.org](http://www.embarqblog.wri.org)

experience, speak out against the conspicuous consumption of land that is the hallmark of American development.

On that note, I can't talk about publicizing planning ideas without mentioning the APA's main publication, *Planning*. If *Planning* were a city, it would be called Dullsville, USA, population: too many ads, with a climate of not enough guts. Kudos to the editors for kicking it up a notch on climate change, but the magazine makes it look like the APA still has a schoolyard crush on New Urbanism, and it's still lingering on the fringes of the biggest planning debates in the United States without taking distinctive stands. And the layout? Whoever chose that typeface missed Design Class 101. *Planning* definitely needs a makeover. I nominate the URBAN editorial board to do the deed.

**Editor's note:** The URBAN editorial board thanks Matthew for the nomination. Viva les radical ideas!

# ASK A PRO-FESSOR - Urban Planning: art or science?

Is urban planning an art that uses scientific tools, a science that requires a bit of creativity to get the job done well, both, or neither? We put our faculty to the test with this officially artful, non-scientific think-piece. URBAN asked them to discuss briefly the nature of the planning field, and the creative and/or scientific methods employed in the planning process. Here's what they had to say:

## Elliott Sclar

To be a good urban planner you need to develop an urban imagination. What I call an urban imagination is a variant on what the late Columbia University sociologist, C. Wright Mills called a sociological imagination. Mills meant the ability to see the impact of broader historic forces on the lives of individuals. I mean the ability to see the historic process through which the social and physical elements of the urban context evolved. It is easy to walk out of the gates of the campus and take the urban reality that confronts you as something that is just there. But it is important to remember that the people on the street as well as the buildings, traffic lights, median plantings, etc. are all there as a result of myriad individual decisions. While the decisions are individual, the historic forces behind them are all social in nature. The urban fabric in both its social and physical manifestations is not static. It is an ever-changing mosaic of people, buildings, and infrastructure. It is this dynamism that creates the vitality that has been luring people to cities for over 10,000 years. As you stand at Broadway and 116<sup>th</sup> Street, you know that somewhere people who will change what you see are on their way. They are coming for a variety of reasons. But once they arrive, they will change the scene on the street, some will change the buildings, and others the infrastructure.

You as an urban planner do not need to understand all those countless decisions, but you do need to understand how larger forces of the economy, governance and social life are driving the options from which the ultimate decisions are made. To have an urban imagination is to have the ability to understand how these larger forces will alter the urban fabric. The most important things you will need are the ability to give language or graphic representation to the processes you are observing. The social sciences, and even the physical sciences, can help you a little in this regard. The ability to see new physical options is also a useful tool. The courses you take, the conversations you have with your fellow students and professors, are all part of the process of creating your urban imagination. Each of us develops our own imagination and narrative to explain it. There are no right and wrong answers here; just good ones and better ones. The first step in developing your

urban imagination is to remember that every time your eyes take in an urban scene, you will try to imagine all the events and decisions that had to be made to create that reality. You also need to remember that the reality that you are beholding is changing even as you stare at it.

## Floyd Lapp

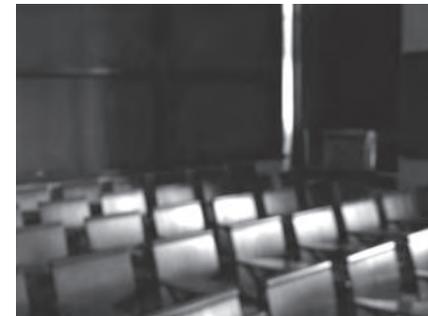
Forty-five years ago, when I started studying planning, there was a major move toward the use of mathematical models to predict travel behavior, urban form, and shape. It hasn't worked.

As we seek to define the problem, identify the alternatives, project the outcomes, and decide among alternatives, the planner cannot really be comprehensive. Herbert Simon was right when he said that decision-making cannot be made processing and obtaining all information since we lack that capacity. Instead, we make planning decisions on the basis of "satisficing." That is, we take a course of action that is 'good enough.'

In a Columbia studio I supervised that dealt with the future of the Tappan Zee Bridge, the students reviewed and decided upon various options: build new or rehab; select one or more forms of transit for the bridge based upon generally accepted criteria; and put the transit in the context of a low-density suburban environment with rugged topography. The students recommended building a new bridge with bus rapid transit because it provided the extra dimension of flexibility that light and heavy rail lacked on a fixed right of way.

As a practitioner at the New York City Department of City Planning, our team selected the best rail route to LaGuardia Airport based upon the following criteria: a route with access to midtown west and east, and also lower Manhattan, which is where most of the trips are located ; a route that travels through one of the four East River tunnels that has the least subway congestion and is most proximate to the airport. As a result, the 'N' train was selected.

The art form has to do with Simon's "satisficing" and doing the best we can to select the criteria that seem to work rather than merely running a quantitative model that lacks the touch and feel of the people it is designed to serve.



Photograph by Minna Ninova

### **Sigurd Grava**

It has always been fashionable for planners to shyly state that their profession is more art than science. This implies a politically-correct modesty and suggests that we are creative people. What it really means is that we are not quite sure about what we are doing, and expect to be listened to because of our deep insights and educated instincts. It rarely works.

It has been my experience in practice that when I adopt this attitude, I am confronted by other “artists” – local residents and officials – who can bring to the table their more intimate familiarity with the area being planned and stronger emotions than what I can offer. I have to be able to show that my recommendations are solidly based on reliable knowledge of how things work, what are cause-and-effect possibilities, what has been effective (or not) elsewhere, how trends and external forces are likely to shape the future, what are the predictable consequences of alternatives, and which actions will bring desirable results (and why). All that is not quite an “exact science,” but it does resemble the scientific method.

We are not physicists or biologists, nor should we be, but a solid base for our work is necessary and almost always possible. I am talking not only about water supply and transportation plans, where nothing less than exact calculations will do, but about almost all aspects of city structure and operations. There is accumulated experience, understanding of processes, measurement of needs, ever-growing databases, and risk estimates. Even human behavior can be gauged by social and attitudinal surveys. Simulation models (admittedly, they can be improved) can be employed in several sectors; forecasts and threat analyses can be used with some reliability; evaluation processes can be carried through with rationality, and options can be explained. During the last half-century, much empirical information on system and service operations has been gathered, and it can be used to arrive at meaningful estimates of future needs and conditions. There can be no excuse in not bringing to bear all that we actually know to any planning problem. That is not to say that we should forget vision and imagination, but let us leave the “art” for improving our skills in presenting our ideas.

### **Peter Marcuse**

Art has many meanings, and while some plans may be artistic, few are concerned with art in its aesthetic sense. Even the current fashionable discussion of art as part of a “creative economy” is not concerned with art as art, but art as economic product, art production as a sector of the economy. That is a shame for good art, whether producing profit or not, can contribute substantially to the quality of life in cities.

Yet urban planning rarely considers the thorny questions of art in public spaces, where the multiple contributions of art might be very manifest, except perhaps to indicate possible locations at which art could be placed. Certainly the question of “what is art?” is outside our parameters, and should only be tangentially involved in most planning work. But the relationship of what is placed in public spaces and the life of the communities around such spaces, or those using such spaces, ought to be of serious concern to urban planning. And not just as to whether art in public places interferes with other uses of such spaces, e.g. free movement, although that is indeed a concern. Nor should the planning concern be limited to whether the public placement of art will prove an economic benefit, as in the attraction of tourists. The concern should further include the social consequences of the placement of art, including both the impact of the art aesthetically, its political meaning, its social function, and the process by which the choice of the art and its placement is made. A number of instances of painful conflicts around the placement of art in public spaces could teach planners much. One might even then propose (I have!) a planning process for art in public places that may ameliorate some of the difficulties reflected in these cases. It is unworthy of planning to treat art only as a commodity.

### **Michael Fishman**

Art and science, Einstein’s space, Van Gogh’s sky, it’s a little bit country, a little rock and roll. Such a simple question can mislead one to believe that there is a simple answer.

Theoretically speaking, planning is a science, of course—market economics, traffic flow, forces of nature, structure and physical form—it is purely quantifiable in this regard. Planning is also a (theater) set designed for real life—art frees us from the monotony of quicker, cheaper, faster; the City expresses itself in open spaces and public works.

In reality, however, we must approach city planning projects as an artist does—with a fresh perspective seeing every problem and opportunity for the first time as unique to culture and context. At the same time, we must rely on scientific method—best practices, learning from mistakes, technology and professional experience—to make the planning process efficient. The art and science of planning come together on successful projects.

In a design/build culture, planning has been abandoned, left behind as both a pseudo-science and leave-it-on-the shelf art form. But planning can emerge as the renaissance profession. Planners can come along with artists and scientists, politicians and engineers, architects and clients alike, and insert common sense, practical options, fact and precedent, as well as beauty to an otherwise conflicted process.

# BILBAO. 1997-2007

BIG names, BIG deals, and the growing pains of a post-industrial 'it-town' in Northern Spain.

BY Leslie Alba and Minna Ninova

**T**he Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain opened to the public on October 19, 1997. Dramatic in form and innovative in content, it was an instant Mecca to many. As part of the renowned Guggenheim dynasty, the museum attracted art connoisseurs from around the globe, for whom the Guggenheim tag promised a new and exciting curatorial adventure. The building was designed by preeminent 'starchitect' Frank Gehry and was a calling for many fans of flashy architecture and tourists bored of the predictable European destination; Bilbao made for added novelty at the ticket counter. The City, however, did not just seek to be the depository for Western Europe's next Guggenheim (Venice has one too), it wanted to be part of the artwork.

**Bilbao is the kind of city that can upgrade from a non-destination to a place where the Norman Fosters of the world want to build their bridges. Yet, despite its opportunistic presence, how does this archetypal Bilbao come into play with the 'Guggenheim Bilbao'?**

It is perhaps a sad fact of a planner's life that news-making museums don't fall from the sky – not even in Europe. In the case of the Guggenheim Bilbao, the development's main proponent came in the shape of the Basque government, which saw an opportunity to redevelop the City's antiquated and disinvested industrial waterfront. Bilbao had never been a town of glitz or glamour, and in fact still feels rugged and scabrous in comparison with the charm of nearby San Sebastian or the vibrancy of Barcelona. The government decided that foreign investment in the cultural sphere was the ammunition they needed for remaking Bilbao into an international destination. Placing the Guggenheim in Bilbao was thus a strategic move by the municipal government aimed at making an "art-place" out of the City. The move paid off – the contrast between world-class art and the Bilbao's rusty industrial past struck editorial gold. Frank Gehry won international acclaim for his powerful, imposing steel design (which is emblematic of the City's industrial character) and visitors poured past the turnstiles by the thousands; the "Bilbao Effect" was born.

The Guggenheim directors wanted the building to be a daring, enduring artistic statement, looking to gritty industrial austerity as a backdrop for the project's unabashed *pas de deux*. However, the bold nature of this intervention leads one to question whether the courtship between glamorous architecture and a no-name city answered the hopes of Bilbao's policymakers.

Currently, the City of Bilbao can confidently say that many more people have crossed its borders since the Guggenheim opened its doors than they ever did before. Tourists typically visit for one or two days, attracted by the City's famous designs and structures (Bilbao is also home to a Norman Foster subway station, and a bridge and airport terminal designed by Santiago Calatrava). Clearly, this town can lay claim to some beautiful public infrastructure, demonstrating how a city's artwork doesn't have to be confined to museums, but can also be woven into the fabric of everyday life. Ask a restaurateur in the Bilbao's Casco Viejo neighborhood, however, and he or she is likely to give you a less emphatic account of how the tourists saved the City. The remark would probably go something like this: "They come for the museum for one or two days to see Gehry's building, Norman Foster's sleek subway station, and Santiago Calatrava's bridge and airport terminal. Big architecture – big deal! Are they in my restaurant? No. This building is older than Calatrava's grandmother and I don't see Zaha Hadid wanting to do anything about that. As far as I'm concerned, they may as well have dug a tunnel from the airport to the museum café."\*

The would-be statements, like the one above, reveal that Bilbao is the kind of city that can upgrade from a non-destination to a place where the Norman Fosters of the world want to build their bridges. Yet, despite its opportunistic presence, how does this archetypal Bilbao place against the 'Guggenheim Bilbao'? Technically and metaphorically speaking, it comes in second place. In other words, the physical and visual enhancements have their limitations, and the question we have to ask ourselves is: If we build it, will they come? More importantly, will they stay? Will investors and residents consider this Bilbao a place where they would like to plant their money trees? Is there anything to look at, and buy

when the museum gates close? How many times can we walk across a famous bridge before we need a decent glass of Rioja and some tapas?



Image of the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao  
from [www.newton-i.usefilm.com/images](http://www.newton-i.usefilm.com/images)

It is reasonable to suggest that urban design has become one of the essential components for sparking economic growth and revitalization in areas of decline, especially at a time when former industry has left behind an opportunity for redevelopment and a something of a "coolness" potential. Design can enhance a public space and help to create a destination for visitors and residents, providing an incentive for additional development. Still, before you start bending steel sheets in loops and waves, stop and think about what was there before the 'starchitect' arrived. What caused the city to decline in the first place? What will a major design intervention do to the wounds and scars of post-industrialization? In Bilbao, the potent dose of art and architecture has created some really cool things to look at and an interesting aesthetic contrast between past and present. What it hasn't done is send tourists scurrying down the City's streets and alleys to the shops and restaurants of Old Bilbao, nor have they jump-started other, less spectacle-driven development throughout the City, leaving a yawning chasm between modern art and the modern condition. As a result, ten years after the Guggenheim teamed up with Bilbao to create a destination, Bilbao the City is still in second place. These architectural enhancements have created an interesting contrast to the City, which is left stagnant.

Using cultural development as a tool for urban revitalization is not a new technique. In fact, it is often seen as a solution, if not a cure-all for cities in need of an economic boost. However, in order for these developments to be successful along a broad spectrum, considerations to art and artful planning need to leave the museum grounds sooner rather than later in order to get acquainted with its host city. A recent, random Google search came up with few tourist activities in the City of Bilbao that don't mention the Guggenheim, Norman Foster's subway station, or Calatrava's bridge. Google may think the rest of the City is obsolete, but we know better than that.

*\*Statements have been embellished by the authors. Zaha Hadid was not contacted during the writing of this article.*

## THE ART OF PLANNING

# READING THE CITY:

## An interview with Elizabeth Currid, Author of *The Warhol Economy: How Fashion, Art and Music Drive New York City*.

**BY Michelle Tabet**

As an exploration of New York City's cultural scene, the 'Warhol Economy' not only exposes the ins and outs of the City's creative networks to the non-initiated reader, it also makes a bold statement about the role these networks play as economic drivers within New York City. In her breezy, first-person narrative, Elizabeth Currid, who recently earned her PhD from Columbia's Urban Planning Program, engagingly argues that culture in the form of art, music, and fashion is a tremendous money-maker that is too often ignored by the City's policymakers. Her account traces the roots of this economic potential to the late 70's heyday of the East Village as the center of the global counter-culture movement. In so doing, she explains how parties, gallery openings, and concerts contribute to the economic success of what has now become a citywide 'cultural economy' in its own right.

For Currid, the disciplines of the cultural economy are seamless: from DJ to graffiti artist to gallery manager, creative individuals spill into different spheres of cultural production as their interactions in 'hip' neighborhoods multiply the opportunities for artistic collaboration. But as her account convincingly demonstrates, the success of the creative economy is also inextricably linked to the neighborhoods that house it; low rents, slow residential development and large spaces allow for creative exploitation of space which systematically involves a vibrant night life.

Given the weight of creative industries in the New York economy, Currid argues that efforts to promote and preserve them should be at the heart of urban policy. She critiques policymakers for overlooking the tenuous balance between education, creativity, and exposure to other culture-makers, especially in neighborhood redevelopment initiatives that make an artist's lifestyle financially unsustainable, in effect throwing out the baby with the bathwaters of gentrification. 'Can urban policy help New York become a giant Warhol Factory?' Currid asks. Can the social scene of the cultural economy be orchestrated by policy without losing its edge? Where does the informal end and formal begin in the cultural economy?

For this semester's issue, *The Art of Planning*, Elizabeth Currid sat down with Michelle Tabet for an exclusive interview about what motivates her work and her views on life in Los Angeles, where she is currently an assistant professor at the University of Southern California's School of Policy, Planning and Development.

**Tabet:** How did urban planning help you shed light on the phenomena you were observing in New York City's cultural scene?

**Currid:** Like all PhD students, I tended to over-intellectualize everything. Since, in my downtime, I spent a lot of time going to art galleries, shopping and doing "cultural things" – so to speak – turning my outside hobbies into a research project was a natural extension. I remember reading *Vogue* magazine and thinking, "How does the fashion industry work? How do trends manifest? No one's ever really looked at these issues, why don't I?" For me, as an urban planner, these issues were clearly tied to geography: particular places were more likely sites of cultural creativity than others and so part of my exploration was to understand the link between place and creativity.

**Tabet:** Given your insider knowledge of New York City's cultural scene, how would the creative industries respond to institutionalized policies that try to orchestrate their activities? What role does informality play in the cultural economy?

**Currid:** Informality is key. The informal social dynamics are central to cultural production in New York. People use their informal social networks to get jobs, to get information about trends, to distribute information about their own work, and so on. Informal social networks are essential to the mobilization of careers, and the distribution and valuing of cultural products. Without these informal dynamics (and the institutions where they occur, like nightlife and gallery openings), the cultural economy in New York City would not be as successful as it is. So in this respect, cultural policy becomes really tricky. The best policy is that which cultivates the possibility of creativity as opposed to direct intervention. In other words, zoning and anti-gentrification measures that provide rent subsidies to artists and promote the clustering of artistic communities and their accompanying social milieus are much more effective than trying to promote a New York City government sponsored by [the trendy Chelsea nightclub] Bungalow 8. Chances are, the latter wouldn't be known as a particularly hip hangout. But giving cultural producers the ability to create their own communities and networking is crucial in promoting the cultural economy.

**Tabet:** How does a New York aficionado like you manage to survive in Los Angeles? What is the cultural economy like there? How does it differ from New York's scene given the differences among the two cities in terms of spatial configuration?

**Currid:** Well, New York City and Los Angeles are obviously vastly different types of places: geographically, culturally, and economically. That said, they are two critical hubs of arts and culture in the United States and the world. LA has a thriving art scene, it just hasn't built its reputation as such quite yet. While public perception may be that LA isn't a big place for culture (other than movies and celebrities), the numbers of creative firms and people living and working in LA demonstrate that the City is a very strong center of the cultural economy, and in some realms, at a greater concentration than in New York. Nevertheless, it is very different from New York, and one of the striking ways is that the space and sprawl means that different cultural industries and "scenes" are less likely to bump up against one another. For example, if you're out in the Meatpacking District in Manhattan, you may be hanging out with the artists and bohemians at Passerby [Bar], but right around the corner is Double Seven and Lotus where all the 'fashionistas' and celebrities hang out. You're a 15-minute cab ride from the Lower East Side where you can hang out at the Box – where a lot of film stars go – or Max Fish, a longstanding hub for graffiti artists and skaters. In LA you're in West Hollywood which is teeming with celebrities and models or you can be downtown at an edgy bar listening to Shepard Fairey [DJ], but chances are these scenes won't intersect and you won't be in both on the same night. Geographically speaking, they're just too spread out. There are pros and cons to this spatial configuration, but without going into those, it's worth noting that the collectivity we witness in New York is more difficult to achieve in LA. Though I must say, when I do go to events in LA, like big museum openings, I find that the crowd is amazingly diverse. So my sense is that creative people in LA very much enjoy interacting with each other – it's just not as easy to do as it is in New York City.



Photograph of Elizabeth Currid by Michelle Tabet

# An Artist's Take on GENTRIFICATION

## An Interview with Bushwick Artist Graham Coreil-Allen

BY **Therese Diede**

A Google™ search for the word ‘gentrification’ will inevitably result in the keywords ‘bohemian’ and ‘hipster’. What is going on here, and why should urban planners care? As a way to explore the relationship between gentrification and art, I opted to let one Bushwick artist speak for himself.

Meet Graham Coreil-Allen, an installation artist and event organizer living in Bushwick with a pretty noteworthy agenda—urbanism, sense of place, social justice, and personal identity make up his short list of concerns. He is particularly interested in direct-action public installation and has been an active participant in various neighborhood parades, the Bushwick Open Studios art festival, formal gallery shows, and many informal art performances. As Graham and I discussed his experience in New York City – specifically, his thoughts on the gentrification of Bushwick – I pondered how planners might best engage the needs of both community and artist.

**Diede:** Why did you choose to move to NYC to pursue art?

**Coreil-Allen:** Growing up in Florida and the Gulf Coast, I often found myself searching for a community of like-minded artists and audiences. Like many artists, I chose to move to New York City to have direct access to the City’s unparalleled collection of art organizations, institutions, venues, artists, and participants.

**Diede:** Elizabeth Currid argues that art, fashion, and music drive the economy of New York City in what she labels the “Warhol economy”. What are your thoughts on this?

**Coreil-Allen:** The creative industries are but one component of a complex metropolitan economy. The art, fashion, and music industries, as promoted by the locus of media outlets in the City, seem to ensure the City’s everlasting *coolness*.

**Diede:** How does the City – the people, the culture(s), and the built environment – serve your art interests/projects? Is it a good place for experimentation?

**Coreil-Allen:** New York City’s rich history of experimental art-making pretty much legitimizes anything I want to do, at least to some audience somewhere. Being around

other like-minded artists and non-artists allows me to pull off projects that would otherwise be more challenging. That being said, as an artist dealing with public space, I also feel that any city or suburb would be a great place for experimentation.

**Diede:** Why did you decide to live in Bushwick?

**Coreil-Allen:** I moved to Bushwick for the affordable rent, to be around my close friends, and to get involved in the area’s nascent arts community.

**Diede:** Have you witnessed gentrification here?

**Coreil-Allen:** Gentrification is rampant in Bushwick...accelerating rates of rent increases, evictions, renovations, and condo construction.

**Diede:** As an artist, what is your relationship to gentrification? How do you see yourself contributing to or limited by the process?

**Coreil-Allen:** As an artist, my mere presence and the media attention that my work may bring contributes to making the neighborhood seem ‘hip’ and thus more attractive to yuppies. In addition, my being white also makes the area feel psychologically safer for other higher-income white people. I can also afford to pay slightly higher rent for my live/work space than most of the long-term residents in the area. My life and work will be limited by gentrification once I can no longer afford to live here. This process of artists inadvertently sparking gentrification of a poor neighborhood has happened so many times in New York City that we can no longer be ignorant of our role in the process. In response, many of us artists have joined together as an organization called *Arts in Bushwick* to try to explore ways to curb gentrification by working in solidarity with long-term residents and other neighborhood organizations.

**Diede:** Where else have you lived, and how did these places compare to NYC in terms of serving your art interests?

**Coreil-Allen:** I have lived in Galveston, Tampa, New Orleans, and Sarasota. The latter two cities provided me with many unique opportunities to practice direct-action public art. All four cities are remarkably more affordable to live in than New York City. Nonetheless, they all pale in comparison to the art-making, art-funding, art-organizing, and art-seeing opportunities that New York City offers.

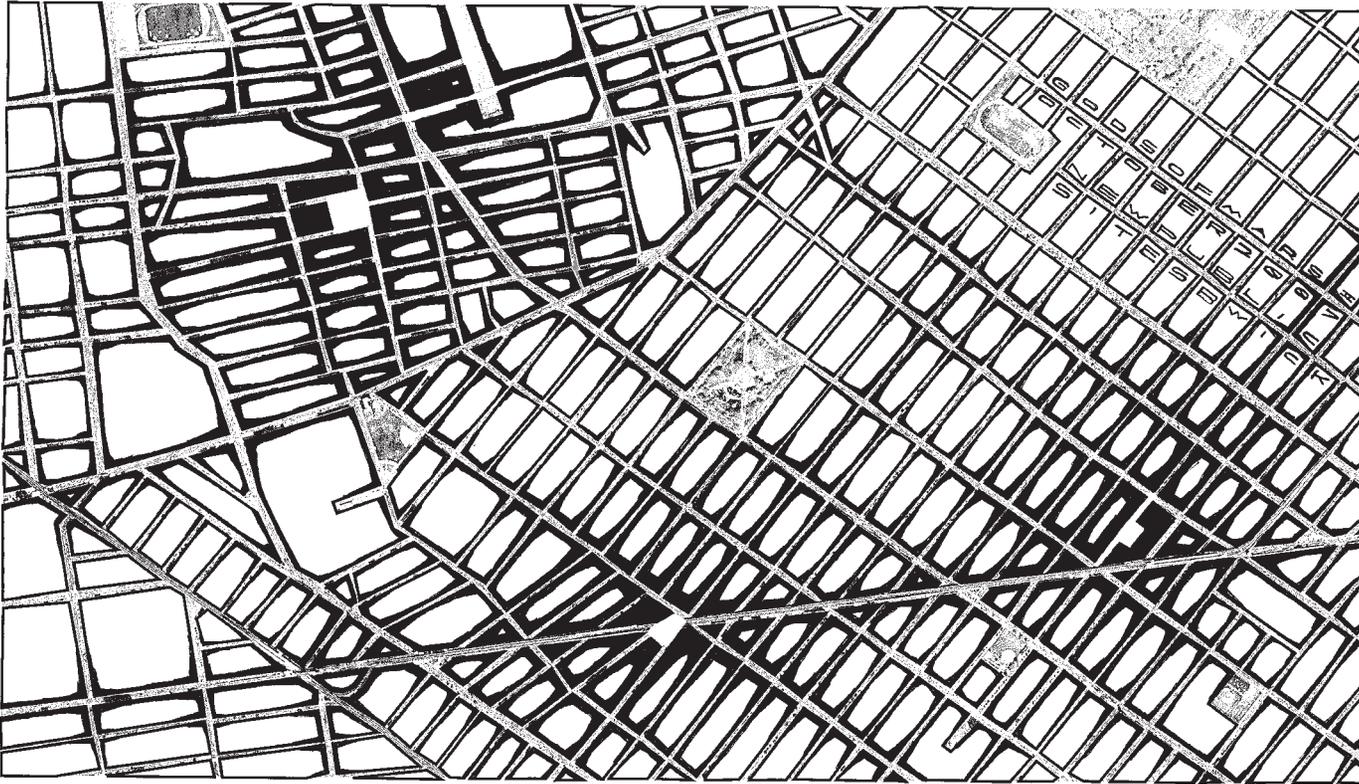


Image by Therese Diede

**Diede:** Do you have any ideas on how cities (or urban planners) can/should respond to artists' needs without limiting the creative possibilities that arise out of spontaneity and freedom of, um, space?

**Coreil-Allen:** City governments and planners should hand over complete control of all public spaces to decentralized, non-hierarchical community organizations. The planners and politicians should be providing consultation to the community groups and not the other way around. Public parks should have freely-accessible graffiti walls and installations areas. All private commercial advertising should be banned from public spaces. I could go on, but you get the idea.

**Diede:** I think that your recent art intervention, *New Public Sites—Bushwick*, might be of interest to my fellow urban planners. What are you trying to accomplish with this project?

**Coreil-Allen:** My inspiration for this project was born out of the sublime experiences I have had while exploring the liminal public spaces in my neighborhood. I have done some similar installations in the past, all founded on a conceptual interest in investigating the questions "What is public space?" and "What is public art?" For *New Public Sites* –

*Bushwick*, I wanted to present a collection of non-traditional public spaces, with the hope of generating interplay of ideas between the differing spatial and emotional experiences. The spaces include a vacant lot left over from a razed building, an overgrown field surrounded by an unfinished warehouse foundation-wall, a stretch of freight train tracks crossing an industrial waterway, and a recently completed parking lot surrounding a large condominium. In addition to generating various architectural, archeological, and emotional experiences, I am also interested in making the sites *more* public through physical appropriation and by inviting others to explore spaces that might otherwise be considered off-limits.

**Postscript:** It is my hope that planners and artists will continue to dialogue about the issues that have been raised by this interview. Certainly, planners must be aware that culture has the potential to increase a neighborhood's desirability, thereby fueling gentrification. But are the artists really to blame for the displacement? Shouldn't there be space in the City for art-experimentation?

One planning response to the arts is to create 'Arts and Culture' districts under the expectation that the label will attract more art. However, more often than not, artists – whether transplants or locals – are priced out of their own neighborhoods. The question then becomes: what role does the City's 'officializing' of the arts play in gentrification, and what can planners do to ensure the well-being of both community and artist? Perhaps the most important provision is space, in the form of affordable housing and community-oriented public spaces...

# PRECITA EYES into the Soul of a Community

BY Kevin Leichner

What do Max from *Where the Wild Things Are*, the fourth archbishop of San Salvador, Monsenor Romero, and the Virgin of Guadalupe have in common? Wall space in one of San Francisco's up-and-coming (translation: on-the-verge-of-gentrifying) urban neighborhoods.

In just 20 square blocks of San Francisco's Mission District, there are more than 100 murals, 30 of them are located side-by-side along the one-block length of Balmy Alley. Muralists began to paint on these walls in the mid-1970s, their empowerment growing out of a nationwide grassroots mural movement in minority communities of color. The murals make powerful visual and political statements on behalf of a historically disenfranchised Spanish-speaking community, most of which traces its heritage to Mexico and Central America.

The mural collection has become a cultural heritage destination. Visitors to the neighborhood receive a colorful overview of the challenges facing immigrant communities, particularly of refugees from war-torn countries like El Salvador. The murals celebrate the artistic heritage of the Aztec and Mayan civilizations, drawing on the rich imagery of the Aztec codex and the Mayan *Popul Vuh*.

Much of the artwork has been facilitated by *Precita Eyes*, a non-profit group named after a stream that once flowed through this now urban neighborhood. The group also leads walking tours, convenes art education classes, and promotes childhood art-development in the community. In fact, several of the murals were painted by children participating in the workshops led by *Precita Eyes*. One of these murals demands: "HOW DOES ONE DRAW THE FACE OF GREED?" The answer involves oil cans and gas pump nozzles, grenades and machine guns, and gravestones marking the death of Iraqi children and democracy. The central characters of the mural are two faceless men in corporate attire engaging in a dialogue:



Man One: "Disarm yourself."

Man Two: "You go first."

Man One: "No, you."

Photograph by Kevin Leichner

We all know how this game of brinkmanship ends. The children illustrate their solution to this arm's race with tempera paint and wisdom well beyond their years: "Responsible Recycled Renewable Resources." It's astonishing that, with the help of *Precita Eyes*, these children have communicated such an important and powerful message. It also raises an obvious question - how can arts education can be eliminated nationwide when the arts clearly have the power to engage children in contemplating complex global affairs or in transforming under-served communities into colorful exhibition spaces?

The children's piece is one among dozens of murals that confront you with its immediacy. Another mural emphasizes the global aspect of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, a disease that first made headlines in the United States in cities like San Francisco. This mural brings attention to HIV/AIDS-inflicted Africa. An excerpt from William Butler Yeats' *The Second Coming*, published in 1921, captions the piece: "THINGS FALL APART/THE CENTER CANNOT HOLD/MERE ANARCHY IS LOOSED UPON THE WORLD." Political discourse, racial conflict, and community memory are here, portrayed on the walls around you, demanding that you become engaged.

Balmy Alley's mural collection also includes *Indigenous Eyes* that watch over the neighborhood (and your reaction to the artwork!) from within a lush mountain-ringed landscape, at least until the garage door upon which the scene is set opens, and the eyes retract. *500 Years of Native Resistance* is depicted on another nearby garage and *500 Years of Rebellion* blankets two sides of a Roman Catholic Church. *Native Resistance*, like so many other pieces in the neighborhood, is not, however, resistant to weather and is showing the signs of exposure to San Francisco's climate conditions—bright sunlight, damp fog, and torrential winter rains. The artwork is also not resistant to neighborhood change and the looming threat of gentrification.

These murals are vulnerable and impermanent. They are painted in tempera on any available surface at the consent of private property owners. A *New York Times* article from March of this year wrote "a neighborhood is a gallery, [and] its brick walls canvases."<sup>1</sup> But if Balmy Alley were a gallery or museum, it is one that is communal, free of charge, and not protected by security guards, curators, or a large budget. Its collection is thus vulnerable to deterioration, decay, vandalism, and redevelopment. There are no conservators or art buffs overseeing multi-million dollar restorations. Fortunately, some of the most damaged murals have been touched up by members of the community and by the *Precita Eyes* organization. Other works have been re-sampled, as artists incorporate them into new murals superimposed upon the old.

Another major force affecting the fate of these murals is gentrification. The Mission District is a far cry from what it was thirty years ago, as is most of San Francisco. This



Photograph by Kevin Leichner

neighborhood, with its storied history, low-rise buildings and innate turn-of-the-last-century charm is a destination of choice for the latest generation of urban hipsters. Part of this neighborhood's resilient response to the forces of gentrification is, of course, art. A mural placed prominently on a neighborhood fence depicts a knife-wielding ogre, with a snake for a second head and dollar signs for eyes, terrorizing a flock of half-dead ducks. The ducks are being forced to migrate away, their suitcases tucked under wings, next to the accusation: "HOME ROBBERS."

A few blocks away, a developer is transforming a long-vacant apartment building into condominiums. As the boards are peeled off of the windows, pieces of a mural that covered the entire façade drift away like autumn leaves. This loss is tempered by a small victory, however, as what remains will be weatherized at the developer's expense. Not far from here, the walls surrounding the 24<sup>th</sup> Street Mini-park are coated with murals painted by children, the new generation of the Mission. They can admire their artwork as they play on recycled-content matting, ride the coils of a mosaic snake and run through a push-button activated fountain.

This park is not far from the *Precita Eyes Mural Arts and Visitors Center*, the organization's headquarters, at 2981 24<sup>th</sup> Street. In addition to its educational role, the *Center* also facilitates mural painting and matches muralists to mural requests. We return to the question—is this a museum? No, this is the fabric of a neighborhood. The Mission neighborhood gives generously, asking for nothing but some thoughtful consideration and respect from its patrons; there is no donation box and no museum store hawking cheap wares at the end of your experience. This is in keeping with the *Precita Eyes* vision statement: "We intend to bring art into the daily lives of people through a process which enables them to reflect their particular concerns, joys and triumphs." If only planners could be so inspired...

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# THE ART OF PLANNING

## Creatively Logical Ideas for the Future of the City

The best artists defy the tyranny of characterization. Yet with all due respect to the *je ne sais quoi*, we can safely say that among the traits which make artists tick are good amounts of imagination, innovation, and a certain distaste for the status quo. Though applied differently, these traits are also essential for planners facing the existing challenges of the built environment and its uncertain future. The best practitioners are not limited to a vocabulary of *what has been*, but can envision new possibilities of *what could be* for the urban landscape. This is the art of urban planning.

Given their permanence, scale, and cost, urban projects involve social, physical, and economic repercussions that not surprisingly dwarf those of individual works of art. Planners thus rely on reason and logic to systematically anticipate and measure the consequences of their creations. In this regard, planners must be both methodological and innovative when integrating new works into the urban fabric. This issue of URBAN explores the strange, wonderful marriage between the art and science of urban planning.



Image from [www.flickr.com](http://www.flickr.com)

Is urban planning an art that uses scientific tools, or a science that requires a bit of creativity to get the job done well? To start things off, we asked several urban planning professors this simplistic question in an effort to shed light on urban planning's very own identity crisis. In this issue's edition of *Ask a Professor*, four distinguished Columbia University professors—Elliott Sclar, Sigurd Grava, Peter Marcuse, Floyd Lapp, and Michael Fishman—explore the sometimes dichotomous relationship between art and science in the field, and weigh in on the creative and rational skills most vital to the practice of planning.

A number of articles in this issue explore planning for arts and culture in an urban setting. Tabet's interview with Elizabeth Currid, author of *The Warhol Economy*, delves into the role of the arts and other creative industries as an informal instigator of economic development, and questions whether urban policy cultivates or hinders the informal production of culture. Similarly, Alba and Ninova's piece examines cultural development as an ostensibly powerful agent of city-wide change by taking a critical look at the so-called Bilbao Effect.

Inherent in the discussion of arts, planning, and economic development is the theme of gentrification. Diede's interview with a Brooklyn artist explores the role that creative professionals play in the process of neighborhood change; while Tabet's article describes one artist's use of photography to chronicle such change. And Leichner, through his colorful description of a community mural collection, tells the story of one San Francisco neighborhood on the brink of gentrification.

Image from [www.flickr.com](http://www.flickr.com)





Photograph by Naomi Hersson

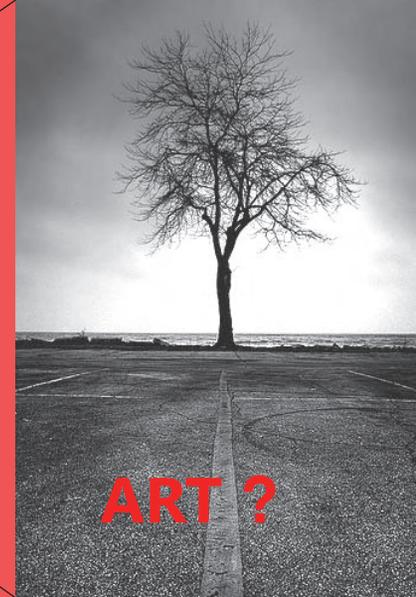


Image from www.flickr.com

Grady profiles the vibrant work of a St. Louis artist who has single-handedly undertaken his own renewal initiative through bold and sometimes rebellious contributions to the urban landscape. While Grady describes one artist's grass-roots approach to urban revitalization, Marpillero-Colomina critiques the MTA's top-down Arts for Transit program, describing the program's projects as "sterile...forced and awkward."

Finally, Potter's piece depicts the City itself as urban oeuvre, a dynamic work of art that is produced and reproduced through a series of daily social interactions, and guided by complex historical narratives and larger market forces. It is in

this context that the City's physical form has been molded, and likewise, it is the City's physical form that influences the experience of its inhabitants.

If the City is art, then city planners, by default, belong in the studio. Some may be the artists; others the critics, theorists, and mentors. All must continue to propose artful solutions to urban problems to effectively live up to this role. The art of planning requires a thorough understanding of a complex web of urban actors (or perhaps they are the muses) and the courage to undertake bold initiatives that may well be the next urban masterpiece.

Image from www.apsorgpublications.com



Image from www.urbanartwarfare.com



# THE ART MAKER OF ST. LOUIS

BY Maggie Grady

This isn't the usual story of artists moving into a desolate area, converting warehouses to lofts, and initiating a wave of economic activity. This is the story of how one man, who won't call himself an artist, built art that actually rebuilt the city. This story features *art*, not its creators, as the deus ex machina swooping in to save the city.

Born and raised in St. Louis, Bob Cassilly has been creating works of public art all his life, but he is quick to distinguish himself from the abovementioned loft-dwelling artists: "it's something of an embarrassment to call yourself an artist...People think they're a bunch of assholes, elitists. I disassociate myself with that aspect of 'artist.'"<sup>1</sup> Cassilly's distaste for the term 'artist' carries over to his work, which he also insists is not 'art.'

Bob Cassilly originally became known for creating huge animal sculptures, including the hippopotamus fountain in Riverside Park. When the City of St. Louis commissioned him to create "turtle park," a sculpture park of friendly giant turtles next to a highway, he also sculpted a giant snake with its fangs sinking into the highway overpass. That wasn't the last time he broke the rules: one night he molded a section of a historic concrete fence, originally built for the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair, into ghostly looking people. The city was less than pleased, but Cassilly's success has always hindered on pushing boundaries.

Cassilly undertook his greatest experiment when he opened the City Museum in 1997. Housed in the former International Shoe Company warehouse, for which Cassilly paid 67 cents a square foot, the City Museum is unlike any other urban place anywhere. The Project for Public Spaces listed it as one of the great public spaces in the world in 2005.<sup>2</sup>

Imagine entering a parking lot surrounding by sculpted serpents to the view of a huge, Soviet-like warehouse with a school bus perilously perched on the roof. The front entrance of the museum is home to the outdoor "MonstroCity," which is the visitor's first taste of the museum's ensuing pandemonium. In addition to the school bus, airplanes, a castle turret, and a rubber band swing unite to form the coolest playground, ever.

Inside the museum are ever-expanding levels of unprecedented experiences. The first floor consists of a winding array of secret passageways made from concrete, metal, plastic, and every other recycled material imaginable. These tunnels snake underneath the floor, inside caves, and up to the second story (enter at your own risk). The first floor also contains a life-size whale, aquarium with native Mississippi River fish, and a two-story slide. The first floor bathroom is constructed solely of old aluminum cafeteria trays.

The upper levels of the City Museum house *The Everyday Circus*, which, as the name implies, is a daily circus that features local kids; *The Hall of Mirth and Mayhem*, home to the world's largest pair of underwear and an in-house palm reader; a movie theater; train tracks; an architectural salvage museum; and an area where you can watch local artists blow glass or buy shoelaces made-to-order.

Today, the City Museum receives more than 600,000 visitors a year.<sup>3</sup> Even more impressively, the City Museum has become an anchor project in the quest to revitalize downtown St. Louis. A recent article in the New York Times notes that, "In the years before the St. Louis City Museum opened in 1997, just one downtown building had been renovated; in the years since, the number has topped 60."<sup>4</sup> Not only has the City Museum converted the long-vacant International Shoe Company warehouse into a thriving space, the museum itself has helped spur the revival of downtown.

Bob's next project is titled "Cementland." He has purchased an old, abandoned cement factory on the Mississippi River in North St. Louis. Within this sprawling compound of dirt, buildings, and machines, Cassilly finds a certain type of beauty: "Our industry, it's kind of like jazz, it's an American, original thing. Why not look at it for what it is? It's impressive."<sup>5</sup> Cassilly wants to preserve this beauty, yet at the same time make it accessible. If his vision materializes, which it almost always seems to do, "the cement plant will be one world-class weird place,"<sup>6</sup> with navigable waterways, waterslides, bridges, and a place on top



Image of Bob Cassilly from nytimes.com



Image of *Monstrosity* from [www.meetusinstlouis.blogspot.com/2007\\_10\\_01\\_archive.html](http://www.meetusinstlouis.blogspot.com/2007_10_01_archive.html)

of a smokestack specifically designed for throwing rocks, because who doesn't love throwing rocks from high places? Creative reuse, indeed.

Not only will "Cementland" turn a longtime eyesore into a great public place, it will also help bring people back to North St. Louis and increase access to the Mississippi River. Cassilly is careful not to brand "Cementland" as art: "It's a giant art installation you can play in. It's anti-elitist. Arts have alienated everyone in the world."<sup>7</sup> He adds that if he called it an art park, no one would come. This is the essential element of all of Cassilly's work; art without pretense. Cassilly's creations are accessible, participatory, and essentially urban in the way they allow one to explore an environment. Most importantly, he realizes that everyone has the potential to be part of the "creative class," if just for an afternoon. Building by building, project by (unpretentious) project, Bob Cassilly's creations are revitalizing St. Louis.

**You can call Bob Cassilly an artist at your own risk. Better yet, forget the labels and go play in his creations.**



Image of the *Cement Slide* from [www.citymuseum.org](http://www.citymuseum.org)

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BY Michelle Tabet

The work of Chilean-born photographer, Camilo Jose Vergara, speaks for itself. No exposé or policy paper can depict with more accuracy the forces of urban change than his encyclopedic collection of photographs taken over the years in some of the country's most infamous 'ghettos': Camden, NJ, Richmond, CA, and Harlem, NY. Year after year, Vergara returns to the same locations to record transformations that have occurred within the urban fabric, creating some of the most powerful evidence of gentrification in America's urban neighborhoods.

As a sequel to Gilbert Osofsky's seminal work *Harlem: The Making of a Ghetto: Negro New York, 1890-1930*,<sup>1</sup> Vergara's 1997 publication, *The New American Ghetto*<sup>2</sup> offers a history of urban change in Harlem since the 1970s. Taking the project into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, Vergara created the "Invincible Cities" website, [www.invinciblecities.com](http://www.invinciblecities.com), an interactive web-based photographic database with the support of Rutgers University and the Ford Foundation. Embedded in both time and space, this database can be queried according to theme, census tract, and address. What's more, by providing a visual complement to census data, Vergara creates a multi-level representation of a reality to which words and figures can only allude.

Vergara relies on an objective and systematic approach to photography, which serves primarily as a documentation device. Thus, contrary to what one might expect of this type of work, Vergara's Harlem is not an image of violence and despair. Instead, Vergara trivializes the role of danger in defining the 'ghetto' and places the focus on the ways capitalism has eroded the historic fabric of neighborhoods. His choice of subject matter – be it store facades, food markets, or simply portraits of residents – is a testimony to the cultural diversity and vibrancy of Harlem in the late 1970s and 1980s. By contrast, the newer pictures show pre-war buildings covered in billboards and Jamaican bakeries replaced by Radio Shacks (best case scenario.) Unprotected by landmark laws, many buildings have not survived the commercialization of Harlem.

With a body of work that brings together artistic production and academic enquiry, Vergara challenges the separation between Art and Science. By refusing to choose camps, Vergara creates a platform for dialogue between photography, planning, and policy that informs these professions in previously unimagined ways and takes the first step toward reevaluating the 'Art of Planning.'

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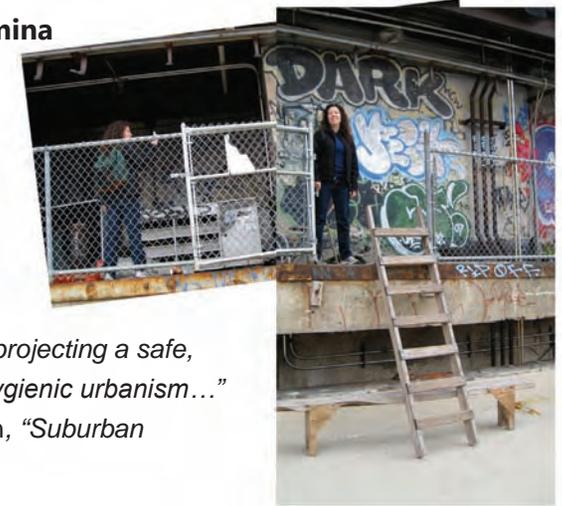
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#### THE ART OF PLANNING

## THE SANITIZATION OF URBAN ART

### An Obituary to Graffiti and Inspired Underground Trumpet Playing

BY Andrea Marpillero-Colomina



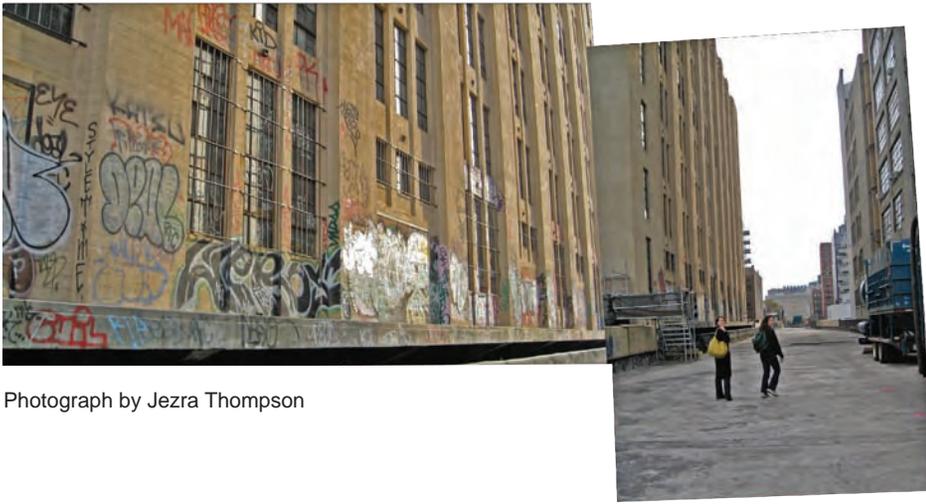
*"Art has long been a vehicle for projecting a safe, gentrified persona for the new hygienic urbanism..."*  
- Neil Smith and Deborah Cowen, *"Suburban Manhattan"*<sup>1</sup>

Photograph by Jezra Thompson

Hygiene is not the word usually on my mind during my daily stints on the express train. When I'm not busy praying that the sour-breathed individual hyperventilating into the back of my neck will choose to redirect his trajectory, I usually amuse myself by reading the wise words that the Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA) shares with its riders. Most of the MTA posters feature people moments away from death: tripping, slipping, falling – on the stairs, on the platform, or in the space between the stairs and the platform. The options for sudden, self-inflicted harm seem limitless, omnipresent in their oversized font printed in blinding colors – a bevy of how-tos for appropriate conduct in our shared space.

In every subway car, scattered among the more ominous signs are gently worded stanzas in cutesy fonts, often fragments of larger poems written by internationally famous poets. These verses pull us away from the reality of our overheated car, our gloomy companions, and the threatening possibility of a slip, trip, or fall. A welcome from 'Arts for Transit'...

I can't help but feel that this is just the MTA toying with our minds. For me, art is synonymous with freedom, with the opportunity and ability to express emotions and ideas through creative, self-inspired and motivated form. The poetry in my subway car feels forced, awkward – like that chair at the 116<sup>th</sup>-Columbia stop which appears constructed



Photograph by Jezra Thompson

of barbed wire where no one ever seems to sit. There are of course challenges that come with introducing art into a public space. The piece must be inoffensive, the material durable, and its presence subtle enough that it doesn't inhibit the functions of the space. Yet, there exists a marked difference between inoffensive and interesting, between un-inflammatory and relative. If people are unable to connect with the art right in front of them—the de-contextualized poem, the isolated chair—how much of a public purpose is it really serving?

In his text, *Art, Space and the City*, Malcolm Miles writes, “the use of culture as a means of preserving social order is stated as a general characteristic of bourgeois society... it displaces value into an aesthetic domain, setting up a duality of art and life, allowing the impact of power or money on everyday life to be unquestioned, or at least less questioned.”<sup>2</sup>

The MTA has set-up artistic forums completely disengaged from their urban context. The Authority, as they refer to themselves, has created art with rules:

“No person shall destroy, mark, soil or paint, or draw, inscribe, write, spray paint or place graffiti upon, or remove, injure or tamper with any facility, conveyance, sign, advertisement, notice or other property of the Authority, or attempt to commit any of the aforementioned acts, except that this subdivision shall not apply to any work within the scope of any contract made by or on behalf of the Authority.”<sup>3</sup>

The “scope of contracts” include the shiny mosaic installations along the 1 train that tell a mis-history of this City and its people. At Christopher Street-Sheridan Square, mosaics depict vignettes of the community by dividing people into four groupings; Founders, Providers, Bohemians, and Rebels. These groupings are meant to illustrate the “identities” of Greenwich Village, yet this categorical classification is a harsh contrast to the community’s history of collective mobilization for social change. What happened to the story about a community that was born in the spirit of collective action, and who authorized this particular telling of the story?

The ‘authority’ forgets that much of American graffiti was born in New York. In the 1970s and 1980s, subway cars became mobile canvasses, the ultimate symbol of the urban frontier – this was the art. And yet, while the subway became an artistic forum, ridership fell to all-time lows. The use of the space as a canvas meant the loss of its functionality; people could no longer comfortably use it as transportation. Public art can become disengaging if it alienates people from using a space for its intended function. When the subway became an unchecked public art forum, a public message that the MTA had lost control of (or at least jurisdiction over) the use of the subway as a transit system became apparent. The subway clean-up of the late 1980s and early 1990s, during which every mural was whitewashed over, was the MTA’s way of reclaiming the space.

Today, musicians cannot even play in subway stations without being harassed by authorities. Gone are the days of artistic spontaneity, they have been confined to the margins of the space they occupy – under a bright yellow MTA issued banner crediting “Music Under New York” (An Arts For Transit Program).

The art in the subway is now commissioned by the capital stakeholders of the space. Images and ideas previously concocted by subway riders have been discarded in the interest of making a sale, of “showing respect for our customers and enhancing the experience of travel.” What is this art representing? Not the people from the neighborhoods where these installations are made, or the cultures of the local communities where these musicians are beckoned to play. This is not locally grown art, but a series of inseminated cultural ideals, manufactured by a consumer agenda.

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# ON the CITY as OEUVRE

BY Cuz Potter

Like you, I had seen hundreds, if not thousands, of reproductions of Van Gogh's *Starry Night* on postcards and calendars. Still, no flattened, mass-produced image could prepare me for the emotional turbulence of seeing the original at MOMA – an unforgettable encounter with the juicy bulk of the blustery scene's brush strokes. The impact of cities is much the same. No matter how many pictures or films you see of a place, no matter how many histories you've read or stories you've heard about what the city is like, it is not until you are in the city that you can really feel its pulse, its movement, its expression, and begin to make sense of the place as a place. But like great art—or perhaps beyond the ability of even the greatest of art—the city never yields all its secrets. There are always more complexities and more subtleties to be discovered.

In *The Right to the City*, Henri Lefebvre makes this point by describing the city as an oeuvre, which is “closer to a work of art than to simple material product.”<sup>1</sup> For Lefebvre, the city as oeuvre is an object of use value, of unproductive consumption. He cites the medieval Fête as the “eminent use of the city,” since its lavish consumption of goods seeks no advantages other than prestige and pleasure.<sup>2</sup> Even today, the cities of this period serve as exemplars of the city as oeuvre. One need only to think of the merchant houses in Florence and Venice or the towering monastery of Mont St. Michel to understand this point.

But each era produces its own urban oeuvre by imposing form and order on the activities of our urban spaces. The market spaces of the mercantile city give way to the factory yards of the industrial city, and these to the commuting highways of the corporate city. As works of art, cities express the social order of their day. New York itself has expanded from Exchange in the shadow of a buttonwood tree to cathedrals of Commerce, on to states of Empire and centers of World Trade, and is now building impregnable towers of Freedom.

And who are the artists that produce these complex works? Lefebvre explains that, “If there is production of the city, and social relations in the city, it is a production and reproduction of human beings by human beings, rather than a production of objects.”<sup>3</sup> We are the creators. Through our daily actions and interactions, we produce and reproduce the city

as a work of art. We create the ineffable urban subtleties that perpetually escape the forms with which we seek to imbue them. Our energy and labor sustain the use value of cities past, and produce the use value of cities future.

As concrete productions of particular histories, however, it is not the abstract ‘we’ who accomplishes these feats of majesty. No, the local expression of the broader social order is accomplished by particular individuals and particular groups acting within specific historical conditions that both open possibilities for future development and close off others. In the Middle Ages, it was the merchants and bankers who energized and dominated the construction of their cities. After the Industrial Revolution, it was the industrialists who impelled the development of the Manchesters, Chicagos, and Bombays of the world. And they did so through the acquiescent labor of planners, architects, engineers, construction workers, factory workers, families, and consumers of their time. At other times, these groups took it upon themselves to build Garden Cities, Arcologies, and New Harmonys, or they erected new cities with barricades.

Not every merchant, industrialist, worker, and CEO is a creator, however. I do not think Lefebvre would object to taking the further step of distinguishing between those individuals and groups who produce the city as oeuvre and those who merely reproduce it. For a work of art is a sensuous production that brings together new forms into new configurations, generating a series of fleeting experiences that are immediately superseded by more expansive understandings. A reproduction, meanwhile, captures only the coarse outline of this experience, stifling the fullness of experience through the unthinking repetition of form.

So if planning is to be an art, as it should be, and planners as artists, as they should be, we must be sure to create new forms rather than simply reproducing the creations of others. We must produce the city as oeuvre.

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<sup>1</sup> Lefebvre, Henri, Stuart Elden, Elizabeth Lebas, and Eleonore Kofman. *Henri Lefebvre : Key Writings*, Athlone Contemporary European Thinkers. New York ; London: Continuum, 2003: 101.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*: 66

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*: 101

## HOUSING STUDIO

**Professor: Lance Freeman**

**Brooklyn, New York**  
**Rimma Ashkinadze**  
**Basha Estroff**  
**Myriam Figueroa**  
**Maggie Grady**  
**Julie Greenwalt**  
**Christopher Hayner**  
**Sara Levenson**  
**Sonal Shah**  
**Jezra Thompson**

The Broadway Triangle site is positioned at the convergence of Williamsburg, Bedford Stuyvesant, and Bushwick—three Brooklyn neighborhoods characterized by a colorful range of social, cultural, and ethnic attributes. The urgent need for affordable housing in the area, paired with the site's vacant, derelict, and underutilized property supported the position that the Broadway Triangle is a prime area for redevelopment.

Members of the Broadway Triangle Studio Team worked with The Ridgewood Bushwick Senior Citizens Council, The United Jewish Organization, and State

Assemblyman Vito Lopez to create a strategic redevelopment plan for the area. The potential plan incorporated three main goals, which encompassed qualities of affordable housing, economic development (including services and amenities to complement the future residential development), and urban design guidelines that supported the less tangible reformations.

The existing conditions of the Broadway Triangle and the uncertainty surrounding its economic future posed a significant challenge to the Team and its planning process. Shortly after starting the studio project, one of the largest land owners on the site, Pfizer Pharmaceuticals, announced that it would be closing its plant and leaving the Triangle within the year. As the Team conducted its analysis and made recommendations, they remained unsure as to whether Pfizer's land would be deeded to the City or sold for private development; both options would yield divergent outcomes. In addition, the site's industrial and manufacturing-based land use history, along with its subsequent zoning for industrial uses, presented challenges for any redevelopment scheme ventrally concerned with providing substantially more affordable housing.

The Team stepped up to this challenge and conducted extensive groundwork of the physical, demographic, economic, and social characteristics of the Triangle. Extensive research utilizing a number of methodological tools, such as GIS analyses, a comprehensive physical inventory, community interviews, and a small business survey were additionally

conducted to provide integral evaluations of the area and its populations. This effort resulted in the creation of an affordable housing plan, an economic development plan, and complementary urban design recommendations that would guide future development within the Triangle. The affordable housing proposal included rezoning city-owned property to maximize the number of affordable housing units and privately owned land to implement a 50/50 inclusionary zoning incentive program. The Team designed its economic development plan for the Triangle in conjunction with the affordable housing recommendations to support existing businesses and industry currently thriving within the Triangle and to attract additional services. Job and skill training programs were tangentially incorporated to support employment and a business support center that would utilize existing community assets to provide assistance to local businesses. The Team further recommended that a portion of the Triangle remain a light manufacturing zone in order to affirm the economic development goals and to protect some of the existing manufacturing uses within the Triangle. Finally, the Team produced a number of urban design guidelines to promote street life, pedestrian activity, maintain visual cohesion, and a reasonable balance between places of business, residential uses, and recreation centers.

The members of the studio recognized the Broadway Triangle's immense potential as a thriving place to live and work. If the Triangle's redevelopment scheme includes the Team's suggestions, a formerly underutilized, historically manufacturing area could be transformed into a coherent residential neighborhood with mixed uses. Those who are currently being priced-out of the neighborhood because of rising rents could have the opportunity to live affordably, deterring symptoms of gentrification. Services and amenities would be integrated into the neighborhood fabric to provide residents with a place to buy fresh foods, everyday goods, and to interact with one another; making the site a place to call home. Several members of the Team are still working with the clients to sustain this vision.



Image by the Brooklyn Housing Studio

# INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT STUDIO

**Professor: Georgia Sarkin**

**Miches, Dominican Republic**  
**Devanne Brookins**  
**Matthew Crosby**  
**Jennifer Ewing**  
**Nasozi Kakembo**  
**Kristin Niver**  
**Diana Pangestu**  
**Francisco Rodriguez**  
**Rene Salinas**  
**Michelle Tabet**  
**Caitlin Warbelow**  
**Sharon Weine**

In the past few years, with the creation of the Presidential Commission for the Millennium Development Goals and Sustainable Development (COPDES) by President Leonel Fernandez, much attention has been brought to unsustainable tourism development and its consequences on the perpetuation of poverty in the Dominican Republic. Only a two-hour drive away from Punta Cana, the Miches Township and watershed has been designated as the country's next big tourist resort development. Coveted for its miles of pristine beaches, coconut trees, and tropical climate, Miches

nevertheless suffers from severe poverty. With tourism as a given economic driver for the region, the questions facing the 2007 International Urban Planning Studio included how urban planning can help lift Miches out of the poverty trap, and how Miches can simultaneously exploit and conserve its natural resources to achieve sustainable economic development.

Due to the growing interest in the township's tourism potential, COPDES selected the site of as a pilot project for the implementation of sustainable development guidelines in accordance with the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The Urban Planning International Studio, working in collaboration with COPDES, set out to identify economically, socially, and environmentally sustainable development guidelines for the Municipality of Miches as well as urban design recommendations for future urban growth in the region.

Coming from a planning perspective, the team defined three interconnected spheres of wealth – natural, built, and human capital – in order to identify the best way to leverage indigenous resources while preserving them at the same time. This three-tiered approach also helped locate key actors that could address issues locally and at the national and international scale.

Thinking comprehensively was key to the outcome of the Studio as the emphasis was put on the inherent interconnectivity of the MDGs. Infrastructure improvement, for instance, was one recommendation whose pursuit would create a positive spill-over into the public health realm as well as the expansion of economic development opportunities, thus achieving several MDGs at a time.

The policy recommendations were complemented by a regional land use development plan which identified suitable land uses in the region, bearing nature conservation areas, floodplains and riparian river edges in mind. Using GIS Spatial Analysis, the team identified optimal land uses for the whole watershed thus creating a comprehensive regional plan. On a more localized scale, the Studio produced a set of sustainable design guidelines for future development around the urban core such as a waterfront revitalization scheme as well as an eco-tourism resort, all of which took environmental concerns and community welfare into consideration.

In spite of the creative thinking and innovative solutions brought to the table by the team, this experience showed the members of the Studio that planning in and for developing countries is a challenging task with unpredictable political consequences. Dealing with an unfamiliar institutional set-up, with a language barrier and with cultural differences, put a strain on communication between the client and the Studio. Working through these challenges, however, made the outcome all the more rewarding.



Image from the International Development Studio

# NEIGHBORHOOD REVITALIZATION STUDIO

**Professor: Stacey Sutton**

## **Central City, New Orleans**

**Leslie Alba  
Marc Bleyer  
Leigh A. Harvey  
Samantha Magistro  
Minna Ninova  
Sandy Padilla  
Hye Jung Park  
Dana Waits  
Pepper Watkins  
Lien Wong**

The members of the New Orleans Neighborhood Revitalization Studio (more fondly remembered as Team NOLA) began spring semester with a few basic facts: they were going to New Orleans and their mission involved neighborhood revitalization. By the end of February, Team NOLA also knew where to go for the best coffee in New Orleans (keep it local), that there's almost no limit to eating fried foods (...almost), that minivans mean business, and that Tulane students are not to be left alone with unopened bottles of wine (isolated incident.) Most importantly, Team NOLA knew what they had to do in the next few months.

Their client, The Idea Village, a New Orleans-based non-profit focusing on entrepreneurial development, tasked them with developing a feasibility study for a small business incubator on Oretha Castle Haley Boulevard in NOLA's Central City neighborhood. The project aimed to influence the economic and physical revitalization of Oretha Castle Haley Boulevard and of the neighborhood of Central City more broadly. OC Haley (as the Boulevard is more commonly known) was once a thriving racially-mixed retail hub. Though largely spared by the floodwaters of Hurricane Katrina, the Boulevard and its surrounding neighborhood found itself isolated and in poor condition after years of disinvestment and demographic change. Team NOLA's goal was to create a sustainable model for business development, job creation, and workforce training along the corridor, taking into account existing businesses, neighborhood organizations, and physical assets. A secondary objective was to create an exportable framework for urban neighborhood revitalization, based on the idea that clusters of small businesses have potential for stimulating demand in (and for) inner-city areas, potentially transforming neighborhoods into "destinations" for city residents and tourists alike.

For several weeks in January of 2007, Team NOLA struggled with the incubator concept, which made for several spirited conversations around the basic theme of "but what does it LOOK like?!"

With the indispensable guidance of Professor Stacey Sutton, Team NOLA eventually got with it and their research led to a proposal for The Dryades Center for the Building Trades (DCBT), a small business incubator and educational workforce-training program specializing in construction and specialty building trades. Inspired by the City's rich tradition of craftsmanship, paired with the urgent rebuilding needs of New Orleans, the members of the studio believe that their project is the right-time-right-place Big Idea that The Idea Village was looking for. Team NOLA envisions that the DCBT will stimulate new investment and help to increase Central City's vibrancy, while also promoting the education and training of New Orleanians in the building trades. In the long term, they see the DCBT as a catalyst for neighborhood revitalization; as an attempt to create more equitable redevelopment in the City and to cultivate a sustainable workforce; and as a strategy for preserving the historical character of New Orleans. Team NOLA would like to thank the fine people of Café Rue de la Course for taking care of them every morning of their site visit. This project wouldn't have been the same without them (and their lemon bars.)



Image from the Neighborhood Revitalization Studio

# TRANSPORTATION STUDIO

**Professor: Floyd Lapp**

**South Bronx, NY**  
**Meera Bhat**  
**Gavin Browning**  
**Renee Burillo**  
**Ann Foss**  
**Yoav Hagler**  
**Alison Laichter**  
**Shane Muchow**  
**Matthew Roe**  
**Seth Ruggiero**  
**Juan Francisco Saldarriaga**  
**Rob Viola**

In the past several years, a conversation has emerged amongst activists, community organizers, city agencies, elected officials, and transportation experts regarding the removal of the Sheridan Expressway (Interstate 895), an incomplete road begun under the reign of Robert Moses in 1958 that cuts through the South Bronx, one of the most impoverished areas of New York City. The Studio grappled with balancing regional transportation needs as represented by the New York State Department of Transportation (NYDOT), and the needs expressed by the Southern

Bronx River Watershed Alliance (SBRWA), a coalition of community groups and city-wide agencies concerned with this issue. To these groups, removal of the Sheridan Expressway is seen as essential to the future health and prosperity of the South Bronx, and as emblematic for the wider questions of race, class and environmental injustice in America.

The role of the planner is often that of artful negotiator, we must maneuver between conflicting viewpoints. But, reconciliation between the team's point of view and the clients' was not an issue for this studio and the team was essentially abandoned (and eventually disowned) by their client, forced (or enabled, depending on how you look at it) to work independently. Still, the greater goal remained of reconciling the current highway upgrade proposal being floated by the NYDOT and the housing-based highway demolition plan being advanced by the SBRWA. After carefully weighing the options on the table, the team crafted an entirely new solution, proposing Starlight Boulevard, a green, pedestrian-friendly, urban boulevard. This new arterial would reconnect the community with the Bronx River and the future Bronx River Greenway, as well as open up new land for community



Image from the Transportation Studio

use. And trucks requiring access to and from Hunts Point Food Market could continue to use the boulevard as they had used the Sheridan Expressway before, ensuring the integrity of New York City's food distribution network.

Once the team had established that Starlight Boulevard was a viable alternative, they delved heavily into the physical and visual details of Starlight Boulevard itself, producing extensive plans and 3D renderings that included precise road dimensions, pedestrian crossings, landscaping, storm water management, and connections into adjoining park space. When the team made their final site visit, they could almost see the new boulevard stretching out before them.

# THE FAMILY

## The Lives and Times of Columbia University's Urban Planning Students

### Class of 2009:

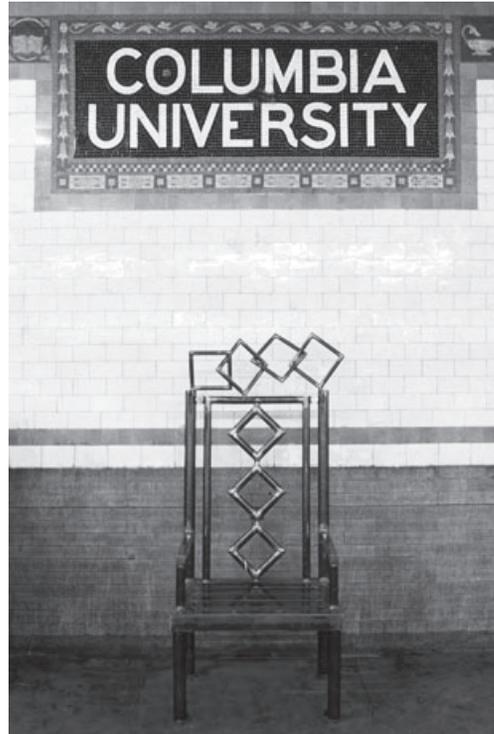
**Pixie Alexander** is from Mobile, Alabama (sort of). She previously pursued (a) painting and (b) photography and dance. She later got a degree from Hunter College in Art History/Urban Studies with a minor in Economics, completed minutes before she arrived at Columbia. Ask her if you want to see a picture of her son, Joe.

After spending 20 years in Seoul, Korea, **Youngji Bae** began her nomadic life by coming to the United States for her college education at Duke University, NC. Even though the lack of public transportation in NC frustrated her adventurous spirit, she nevertheless explored different parts of the world with particular interests in public art, sustainable development and passionate people.

**Catherine Barnes-Domotor** is a first year Urban Planning student who grew up in Washington, DC. While the stimulating political atmosphere influenced her development, she decided she wanted to work in a more manageable and less frustrating field. She therefore decided on attempting to solve all problems of the built and social environment. She currently resides in Brooklyn Heights with her fiancé Chris and their new puppy Casey, and would welcome anyone to come visit her if they dare to venture off the island of Manhattan.

A New Hampshire native, **Thomas Bassett** loves leaving and coming back to his small state, studying abroad, and traveling as much as he can. After graduating from Brown University with a bachelor's degree in Portuguese and Brazilian Studies (yes, it's its own department), the only choice was to move to Brazil. He spent a year and a half in the monstrous metropolis of São Paulo, teaching English and picking up odd jobs. Fascinated by the scale of the city and its problems, he hopes to get back to Brazil and work in the planning field.

**Christopher Bauman** graduated from Cornell University in 2006 with a background in architecture and urban planning. After that, he decided to relocate and recuperate from Ithaca's cold winters in sunny Los Angeles. While there, Christopher interned at a land-use planning firm for six months before moving to Miami, where he was project manager for an urban design and real estate firm that at the time was focusing on live-work redevelopment. He is currently a first year urban planning student at Columbia with hopes to further cultivate his long-standing interests in sustainable, green real estate development and politics.



Photograph by Andrea Marpillaro-Colomina

**Daniel Berger** studied History and Film Studies at Yale, where he graduated with a BA in 2005. After graduating from college, he worked as a paralegal for a year, which made him never want to go to law school. His interests include Asian cities, comedy writing, squash and poker.

**Xu Chen** used to work and live in Shanghai, Hong Kong, Melbourne, inner Mongolia, Shen Zhen, Tian Jin and likes to travel. With three years of experience at a real estate, land development, design and planning company, she would like to share with others, meet different people, and listen to different thoughts.

**Gillian Connell** grew up in suburban New Jersey where seeing local (over)development got her motivated to get involved with issues of urban planning; she hopes to eventually work closely with zoning regulations. She graduated from Skidmore College where she majored in sociology and spent four frosty spring semesters playing outfield for their softball team.

**Kyle Daniels** was born and raised in Providence, RI. Lived in Austin, TX, and Barcelona, Spain. As a lad, Kyle played with Legos, read books and enjoyed camping. Still does. Friend of the bicycle, recycling, and composting. Playing ping pong or the board game Go both delight him. Likes to dance.

Particularly interested in everything, **Therese Diede** decided to quit her one-year experiment in rural life and move to the Big Apple to study urban planning. Coming from the smaller-scale techno-apple of Cupertino, CA, Therese is quite used to fruity associations. Though often quiet herself, she enjoys participating in the raucous behavior of others...maybe yours?

**John Dulac's** state is home to few and holiday to the nation. He spent five years studying international relations and engineering at the university where the Reach toothbrush was invented, and his first name is Ivan in Russian. Maternal language that of Henry VIII, paternal tongue of Henry IV. By the way, he shares a birthday with Rosa Parks.

**Chelsea Feerer** is from Columbus, Ohio and graduated from Tufts University in 2005 with a bachelor of arts in Architectural Studies. She plans to specialize in transportation planning and real estate development, looking at each from a sustainable design perspective. Also, she enjoys exploring and improving cities' land and water recreational opportunities.

**Brian Gardner** is worried about sea level rises and global cataclysm. He sees planning sustainable cities and green real estate development as the way to prevent civilizational collapse and great way to stick it to the House of Saud. Brian also relishes speaking Italian or Spanish while enjoying vegetarian meals.

**Stefanie Garry** was born and raised in New Orleans and spent her undergraduate years studying geography and history at The George Washington University while working in the District of Columbia. She has also lived and studied in Hamburg, Florence, and Panama City, where she developed a fascination with travel, culture, and cities themselves. Cooking spicy food, exploring public markets, and walking on the sunny side of the street keeps the rest of her life in balance.

Growing up infatuated with taking pictures of pretty flowers, **Karolina Grebowiec-Hall** made a dramatic shift to snapping photos of urban dwellers, structures, and streetscapes. She knew there must be something in it for her! After studying development planning and working in London for three years, she is back home in NYC, ready to find her focus.

Before finding herself in New York, **Naomi Heresson-Ringskog** had a shorter name and a greater disposition to speak in third person. Crisscrossing the Atlantic Ocean, this American-Swede spent much time abroad satisfying her penchant for foreign languages, cafe cultures and urban meanderings. New glory days are here, and they hold out the promise of many things fun and visionary (like finding a Finnish style sauna on a NYC rooftop).

**Catherine Kim** was born and bred an Angeleno. She attended undergrad at Occidental College, served in Peace Corps South Africa and worked with a NYC nonprofit housing organization before her GSAPP stint. Her niche interest is economic development, aspiring to contribute towards urban vibrancy and growth opportunities.

**Inbar Kishoni** is probably involved in too many activities for her own good. A geographer by trade, she spent the last two years working as a cartographer. In her spare time she enjoys long walks on the beach, playing the theremin, alphabetizing her records, and writing bios of herself in the third person.

Sick of the endless sprawl in his native Jersey, **Michael Kolber** busted out and moved to Africa. In his beloved Burkina Faso, he discovered a whole new world of urban sprawl. Mike now wants to work in refugee camps as an emergency sprawl relief officer.

Coming from New Hampshire, you'll often hear Kasey LaFlam quoting the best state motto ever: "Live free or die!" Deciding to switch it up from 25 cent beers and honking at leaf peepers, NYC seemed like the best alternative. Oh, and she is also very excited to discover places that stay open past midnight (gasp!).

**Anna Lan** is thrilled to be in NYC for her planning degree. She was born in China but considers Texas and California home. Graduated in 2006 from University of Southern California with a dual degree in International Relations and Sociology, Anna hopes to pursue physical planning inspired by her internship at the Beijing Olympic Committee. During whatever free time is left over, Anna is most likely found walking all over the city.

**Kevin Leichner** spent most of the past 5 years as a "Fed," but not at ATF. Darn. He's lived in Charm City, the City of Angels, Baghdad by the Bay and the Big Apple. He is a Taurus, a Dragon, and frequently reacts based on his daily horoscope. It pays.

**Eileen Leung** graduated from the University of British Columbia with a degree in Global Resource Systems (Sustainable Agriculture and the Asia Pacific) then tried out the farming thing for a while in Denmark and Vancouver. She is on a mission to find good coffee in New York.

Since discovering the Meaning of Life in 1999, **Stephanie Lim** has been touring extensive mental landscapes in search of Happiness. Her stint in New York is Phase IV of a master plan; this phase revolves around the delay of Pleasure. Phase V has yet to be determined.

Despite being a proud Jersey girl, **Kathryn Lipiecki** relocated to study and pursue a career in urban planning and to enjoy car-free living. Upon arriving in New York, she discovered she had never fully appreciated the wonder that is the cupcake and vows to make up for a lifetime of neglect.

**Jiuyuan Liu** came to US with his nice girlfriend two months ago. Before joining this program, he studied Journalism at Zhongshan University, Guangzhou, China. While working as an investigative journalist, he developed specific understanding and knowledge on China's urbanization, land use, and property rights issues.

**Andrea Marpillero-Colomina** is from SoHo, which might explain her fascination with mixed-use zoning, love of shopping, and desire to ban all tourists from the City. She passionately hates the 2/3 express train, yet harbors secret ambitions of becoming a train announcer. Andrea is frequently nostalgic for early 1990s New York.

**(Derick) Soonmahn Park's** favorites: Beethoven Symphony No. 9 in D Minor, Op. 125, Bach Overture Nr.3 BWV.1068, Bach No.1 in G Major BWV1007, Stanley Kubrick, Tim Burton, Henri Cartier-Bresson, Robert Capa, Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, Michel Foucault, Umberto Eco, Snowboarding, Espresso doppio, Remy Martin XO, Ektachrome, Claude Monet's Sky

**Jennifer Pehr** is a fifth-generation Texan who has worked in Israel as a farm hand milking cows and helped plan a city in South Korea. She is excited to begin her next adventure, pursuing her masters in urban planning and public health so that she can try to live up to Gandhi's ideal that "we must be the change we want to see in the world."

**Abdul Saboor** is from Herat, Afghanistan, and holds a bachelor's degree in Civil Engineering. Upon graduation in 2004 from Herat University, he started to work on urban conservation projects in Herat old city for nearly 3 years, during which period he developed a great interest in urban planning. Abdul is delighted to be doing his masters studies at Columbia.

After gaining Hollywood stardom for inspiring the movie 'Spaceballs', **Matt Schwartz** attempted to get away from the paparazzi by spending the next 4 years of his life at

Indiana University where he earned a BS in Public Affairs. After his relationship with actress Natalie Portman ended, Matt decided he needed a new direction in his life and urban planning was it.

From South Korea, **Irene Seo** studied Public Administration at Yonsei University. She has worked for an IT company before as a IT strategy planner. She loves sports and traveling (especially the preparing part). She wants to experience all an Urban Planning master can be in the fascinating city of NY.

**Qianqi Shen** is from Guangzhou, one of the largest cities in southern China, and has spent her last five years in Shanghai getting a bachelors degree in Real Estate and Project Management. Before she came to Columbia, she was interested in the housing and real estate market in China, and had an internship in two of the top five real estate developers in China, as well as a research institute for the government in Shanghai. She's currently interested in economic and international development, and is hoping to find new breakthroughs in both career and academic development.

**Preeti Sodhi** was born in Wichita, Kansas and grew up in New Jersey. She studied Metropolitan Studies and Photography at NYU. Her interests include: architecture, taking pictures, watching movies, rock n roll, hip hop too, cocktails, dancing, good reads, fashion, chit-chat, deep stares, roaming the globe, procrastinating, learning, and new words.

**Patrick Streeter** was born deep within the dark heart of New Jersey. A lover of biology and urban ecology, he has toured the globe searching out cassowaries in Australia, being eaten alive by sifafu ants in Tanzania, and counting street trees in Boston. He now turns his environmental eye on New York and her brownfield bounty.

**Yuan Tang** is a cute Chinese girl with a long black curly ponytail. She is curious about everything and always loves to try something different, from music to sport, from traveling to making friends. Cities and people are especially attractive to her. She is enthusiastic to see how people are making the world and how the world changes the people.

**Christie Walkuski** grew up in Queens and feels more comfortable calling herself a New Yorker than anything else. She's not sure where she'll land in the world of planning, but knows she comes at it from a social justice perspective. Apart from a stretch spent traveling around the US and settling for a time in Atlanta, she can't seem to move too far away from the Hudson River. If she gets any free time in the next two years she would like to finally pick up the guitar and get fluent in Spanish.

**Lin Zhang**, a girl from China, was born in a beautiful seaside city, and grew up there. Having just spent 5 years exploring what architecture is, she is still confused, but now she strives for understanding GIS and SPSS, and it is most likely that she will fall in love with them soon.

## Class of 2008:

**Leslie Alba** is just a non-Greek girl from Astoria, Queens. Leslie likes jumbo slice pizza. You can often find Leslie eating jumbo slice pizza while listening to Journey. Leslie also likes mint chocolate chip ice cream with chocolate syrup and marshmallows. Leslie can often be found at Avery library homeworkin' (while listening to Journey). Leslie is probably eating and listening to Journey right now...

**Meera Bhat** is a part-time planning student and full-time computational biologist. Yeah, she doesn't really know what that is, either. She is a Michigander-Brooklynite who doesn't find the weather too bad here, all things considered. Meera enjoys haircuts, teen drama real and fictional, her brand-new spouse, and urban farms.

After receiving a BA in Art History, **Marc Bleyer** (a.k.a Marcus or Moti) served cheap mussels and beer and backpacked around the Mediterranean. He later paddled across the Black Sea in a canoe, studied the heart rate of the three toed sloth, and had a passionate relationship with his left sleeve. He plans to do his thesis on the various shades of white used in street markings.

Including the hamlet of Boulder from which he hails, **Gavin Browning** has lived in four places beginning with the letter B: Brooklyn, Berlin, Brighton. Now happily ensconced in Long Island City (ending the B hegemony), he wonders if Los Angeles, London or Lahore await. He worked in independent book publishing for a very long time, and can often be seen reading.

**Matthew Crosby** is two meters tall, which is the median height of his fellow Austenites. He graduated from UNC-Chapel Hill in 2002 with degrees in Political Science and Spanish. Thereafter, he spent a year in the Jesuit Volunteer Corps in San Francisco, where he worked as a labor advocate for low-income restaurant workers in the Mission district. He has also been a teacher at Brooklyn Jesuit Prep in Crown Heights, teaching social studies, coaching basketball, and most frequently attempting conflict resolution. He is interested in how to plan for and empower healthier urban communities that struggle with the weight of poverty.

**Basha Estroff** grew up north of the city in suburban tract housing. While suburbia will always hold a soft spot in her heart, Basha couldn't wait till she was all grown up to live in New York City. While she's not sure about being all grown up, she is loving every minute of being in the City and can't believe she wasted so many years in close proximity to



Image from [www.columbia\\_university.edu](http://www.columbia_university.edu)

Wal-Mart. Basha's thesis focuses two of her main interests: zoning and land use planning processes in NYC and its affect on landmark structures.

After an illustrious career as a general with the 3rd battalion in the Union Army, **Yoav Hagler** returned to Brooklyn to play with his home town Brooklyn Nets. Following a second illustrious career as point guard for the Nets, Yoav decided to retire and return to school to earn a Master's in Urban Planning at a University that he helped found several hundred years earlier.

A California transplant, **Leigh Harvey** trekked across the country in the hottest months of summer in pursuit of an urban planning degree from Columbia. She has adapted to New York City fairly well, but occasionally longs for the familiar suburban sprawl that reminds her of home so she frequents Long Island strip malls from time to time. Adamantly opposed to acronyms, Leigh currently interns at EDC where she completes EAFs, CEQRs, SEQRs and ULURPs. If you ask her what her least favorite acronym is, she'll tell you "FU"...as in Follow Up.

**Nasozi Kakembo** always has a song stuck in her head. It is usually samba or the last song she heard on 103.5 FM. She loves dancing on furniture. In her spare time she takes guitar lessons from a hot Rasta. Born to a Ugandan father and African-Cherokee-German mother, she has an innate penchant for travel and exploration. Much loan debt later, she will jet-set around the world exploiting her intuition and prescience to be acquired in the wonderful microcosm of GSAPP, Urban Planning.

**Maggie Grady** is from the most dangerous city in the country. Luckily, she thinks danger is exciting and loves absolutely everything about her native St. Louis. Maggie graduated from Haverford College and worked in Shanghai, China before coming to Columbia. She spends her free time thinking about Meth labs, FreshDirect, and extending her search for the best cupcake to the outer boroughs.

**Alison Laichter** is happy to be back in NYC after spending a few years in the Bay Area analyzing socio-economic trends for an urban planning firm, writing real estate gossip, perfecting recipes at a juice bar, and getting lost in the redwoods. Now, she researches pro-poor business models for the UN, explores secret spaces in campus libraries, and gets lost all over Manhattan.

**Sara Levenson** spells her name without an "H", so watch it. She grew up in Brooklyn and then attended Clark University where she played lacrosse like a virgin and scored like a...well anyway. She has a thing for guys that look like James Vanderbeek. She recently learned the art of omelet flipping and is kind of a big deal when it comes to GIS.

After receiving a BA at Barnard College, **Samantha Magistro** joined Bronx Pro Real Estate as an Assistant Project Manager. During the next two years, Samantha not only developed affordable housing, but also learned all about saving excel spreadsheets, alternative side of the street parking and getting back to Manhattan on a Yankees game day. Samantha enjoys open market rentals, worldpeace, business lunches on Arthur Avenue and playing UNO with her favorite neighbors.

Originally from Georgia Republic **Alex Maisuradze** has a degree in Economics from Vanderbilt University. He came to Columbia from Haiti, where he spent eighteen months with the UN mission, most of the time stranded in daily commutes to and from work. This is where he realized that none of the economics really made sense and planning was da thing. In his free time he enjoys making up captions for the New Yorker cartoons, though none of them made to the finalists, yet.

In a past life, **Shane Muchow** worked as a filmmaker and video editor in Hong Kong, San Francisco, and Seattle. After starring in a Hong Kong commercial eating noodle soup with cuttlefish wontons and eyeballs, Shane decided to pursue a new career of guiding urban development projects.

**Minna Ninova** is feeling a little lost at the moment and looks forward to a time when she'll open up the pages of URBAN and reflect on the halcyon days of graduate school when things seemed more dreary than they really were. Minna does enjoy some things, though, and they include making neat stacks of her magazines, getting her scarves to fall just right, and wondering if she came up with a thesis cool enough for Sara's expectations (it's about art, Vienna, and the spatial diffusion of the former throughout the latter. Ask her later how that works out for her). Minna wishes she were more like Kristin.

**Kristin Niver** is a dual degree student with social work. She is interested in gender and sexuality, the production of space, and Marx.

**Sandy Padilla** is from Los Angeles, California and received her BA in Public Policy from Stanford University. After college, she worked for the The Urban Institute, an economic and social policy research organization, and conducted research on federal dollars spent on economic development programs. After The Urban Institute, she received a Fulbright Scholarship to research European Union funds used for the redevelopment of historic Madrid, Spain. Sandy is currently a dual-degree student with Columbia Business School and is interested in combining real estate finance with urban economic development.

**Diana Pangestu** has disappeared from the lab this year. She has instead infiltrated the environmental engineering and real estate departments. And if you think that there's a new 2nd year asian girl, no it's her, just with normal length hair. Diana misses all her UP friends and would like to say hi: hi!

**Juan Francisco Saldarriaga** is a philosopher from Bogotá, Colombia. He got tired of living in the stratosphere and came back to earth, hard. He traveled a lot and lived in France for three years. Although he often dreams of running away into the mountains, right now he is more interested in improving Colombian cities.

**Rene Salinas** is from Monterrey, Mexico. Before coming to Columbia, spent three years working in the Urban Planning Agency of Nuevo Leon where he saw firsthand the pressing need for good planners in his country. Working for the government made him aware of the political issues in Mexico. He is also an art enthusiast, enjoys movies, photography, and painting. His main hobbies are watching movies, painting, and partying.

**Sonal Shah** is an architect from India. Her work is based in Mumbai, a city that breeds chaos, tactics, corruption, immorality and all that is dark. That's why she loves it! Sonal worked on slum settlements, public housing and urban renewal projects and is interested in studying the City through informal and tactical systems.

'Michelle, ma belle...' yes, that annoying Beatles' song is where it all started. Since then **Michelle Tabet** has lived in Paris, studied in London and Berlin, has a passion for Beirut and loves living in New York City. Being a bit of city-hopper, Michelle enjoys comparing the arts scene, culinary landscape and night-life of the world's global cities.

**Jezra Thompson** is a recovering architect who became less myopic and better grounded in urban planning after searching for more comprehensive solutions to the plethora of urban altercations; though she hasn't lost her appetite for lengthy diatribes notorious of her past. She now has a better understanding of the totality of such intricate problems encompassing cities through an acquired awareness of the multitudinous solutions and necessary involvement of all actors and contributors, which include urban design and planning, architecture, politics, and various engineering, chemical and biological sciences. Jezra hopes to apply her design and planning skills, in correlation with her vivacity and passion for socially and environmentally responsible solutions, to urban and peri-urban environments by broadening urban horizons and opening up centrifugal city hearts.

**Rob Viola** is a 2nd year Master's Candidate in Urban Planning, focusing on environmental and physical planning. His Master's Thesis concerns the economic development ramifications of construction and demolition waste recycling in New York City. Rob comes from a web technology and music background and just became a father last year.

Originally from the DC area, **Dana Waits** moved to New York to attend NYU in 1999. While an undergrad, she spent a semester in Florence and then studied "abroad" in Oxford (Mississippi, not England) where she developed a taste for sweet tea, Elvis, and SEC football. Since college, she worked for the Central Park Conservancy selling benches and snowplowing. She claims to know everything about Central Park and dares you to stump her.

**Caitlin Warbelow** hails from the dichotomous "city" of Fairbanks, Alaska. Since escaping, she has obtained a BA in Anthropology and a BMus in Violin Performance from Boston University, become a corporate pawn to pay the rent, sailed from Tahiti to Hawaii on a 130-



Photograph by Minna Ninova

foot steel brigantine while studying noxious bacteria, worked as a plankton slave/bird butt poker on a research boat in the Aleutians, and taught young'uns to play violin. Caitlin is way too excited about the amount of Irish music happening in dingy bars at all hours of the night all over the City, and she usually regrets saying 'Yes' to that all-too-common phrase, "just one more tune".

**Pepper Watkins** will frequently be found strapped to a banjo, camera, or historic building; when not so accoutered (or sometimes so), he is generally occupied with the completion of the dual-degree program in Historic Preservation and Urban Planning. A native of the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia (and an alumnus of UVA), Pepper's primary interests are in vernacular architecture, the preservation of rural landscapes, and the continuing relevance of the traditional building trades to the broader built environment.

**Sharon Weiner** hails from Chicago (coincidentally, her favorite city). When not occupied with planning and public health, you may find her dancing, roller-blading, playing piano, or reading in a tree. She has a wide range of interests and is terrified of ending up a 'jack of all trades, master of none'... well maybe that wouldn't be too bad.

Deathly allergic to cold, nonetheless **Lien Wong** found his way to NYC three years ago. Through his Urban Sociology program at Pace University, he developed a fascination for all things urbane, especially people, and is interested in the principles of place-making and building of home cities.



## Contact

URBAN Magazine  
413 Avery Hall, GSAPP  
Urban Planning Program  
1172 Amsterdam Avenue  
Columbia University  
New York, NY 10027

[urban.magazine@gmail.com](mailto:urban.magazine@gmail.com)  
[www.urban.columbia.edu/magazine](http://www.urban.columbia.edu/magazine)

To learn more about the graduate program in Urban Planning at Columbia University, visit our website at [www.arch.columbia.edu/urbanplanning/](http://www.arch.columbia.edu/urbanplanning/) or call 212-854-4728