Though awarded the profession’s highest honor—the Pritzker Prize—in 1997, Sverre Fehn, who died in Oslo on February 23 at age 84, was hardly a household name in architecture. The Norwegian architect practiced a poetic modernism in the Scandinavian tradition that was more expressive and less formally driven than Alvar Aalto or Poul Kjaerholm, but powerful in its evocative simplicity. His built works are relatively few and almost all in Norway, but such buildings as the Glacier Museum (1991), the Hedmark Museum (1979), and the Nordic Pavilion for the Venice Biennale (1962) have been recognized as true achievements by academics and practitioners alike, from John Hejduk to Craig Dykers.

Here, architect Steven Holl and artist Dan Graham offer their impressions.

Steven Holl, Steven Holl Architects

Sverre Fehn’s architecture was tied deeply to roots, but always futuristic in spirit. His work expressed the power of the inventive, along with marvelous moments of experiential joy. Standing on the roof of his Glacier Museum in Fjaerland, Norway, I had the feeling he was raising man like a mountain, but then putting him in humble awe of the melting glacier in the distance. The inspirational space and light of his Nordic Pavilion in Venice merges thin, delicate concrete with undulating light shot through with the earth’s counterpoint in piercing trees. This space is full of rhythm, asymmetrically unpredictable. Like a forked musical staff of bars in which notes are the existing trees, the silence is broken by a blasting through to the light.

Fehn’s drawings had the

continued on page 3

For its new, $125 million home in downtown Atlanta, the Center for Civil and Human Rights has announced a shortlist of five architecture teams for the design of a 90,000-square-foot center. These include Diller Scofidio + Renfro of New York with Stanley Beaman & Sears of Atlanta; Freelon Group of Durham, NC, with HOK of Atlanta; Huff + Gooden Architects of New York with Hammeil, Green and Abrahamson of Minneapolis; Moody-Nolan of Columbus, OH, with Antoine Predock Architect of Albuquerque, NM, and Goode Van Slyke Architecture of New York with Cooper Carry and Stanley, Love-Stanley of Atlanta. Launched in 2005 by Mayor Shirley Franklin, the center plans to open in 2012 on a 2.2-acre site on the edge of Centennial Olympic Park. Executive director Douglas Shipman told AN,

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On March 10, the Landmarks Preservation Commission voted in favor of a 286-foot hospital tower in the heart of Greenwich Village, bringing St. Vincent’s Hospital that much closer to building a new home. While regulatory review of the project may still mean months of further scrutiny, the decision moved the long-debated plan across what commission chair Robert Tierney called “a threshold point.” Opponents of the hospital’s plan, however, are not giving up. The day before, a coalition of preservationists and neighbors filed a lawsuit, seeking to overturn an earlier commission vote that had approved the razing of Albert Ledner’s idiosyncratic O’Toole Building to make way for the new tower. At the heart of the

continued on page 9

The Nordic Pavilion for the Venice Biennale (1962).

SVERRE FEHN, 1924–2009

Though awarded the profession’s highest honor—the Pritzker Prize—in 1997, Sverre Fehn, who died in Oslo on February 23 at age 84, was hardly a household name in architecture. The Norwegian architect practiced a poetic modernism in the Scandinavian tradition that was more expressive and less formally driven than Alvar Aalto or Poul Kjaerholm, but powerful in its evocative simplicity. His built works are relatively few and almost all in Norway, but such buildings as the Glacier Museum (1991), the Hedmark Museum (1979), and the Nordic Pavilion for the Venice Biennale (1962) have been recognized as true achievements by academics and practitioners alike, from John Hejduk to Craig Dykers.

Here, architect Steven Holl and artist Dan Graham offer their impressions.

continued on page 3
Silvus Family

Interior/exterior lighting fixtures designed by Roger Duffy of SOM

The modularity of these luminous elements allows for a wide range of applications—single unit, column or field. Its LEDs and carved inner surface evoke the gentle motion of light across water, filtered by foliage.

Shown: Silvus30 (30"x7.5"x6.5") and Silvus24 (24"x13"x6.5")
Various options available for LEDs and finishes
LEARNING FROM THE BRONX

The Bronx is not usually considered a borough of great architectural monuments. Sure, it has some outstanding works built over the years by the likes of McKim, Mead & White, Marcel Breuer, and Richard Meier. Most recently WXY Architecture has transformed the Bronx Charter School for the Arts into a model of how a 21st-century school should be organized. But these remain largely isolated projects in a vast urban landscape of undistinguished residential and commercial development.

Yet if one looks beneath the footprints of this body of nondescript structures, there is another design tradition, not often enough recognized, of extraordinary planning initiatives spanning two centuries. From the 19th-century park advocates who lobbied for open space—the Bronx has one-quarter more dedicated parkland than any other borough—to Robert Moses, who parlayed Bronx estuaries into Orchard Beach even as he Sundered other neighborhoods to realize his grand vision; and from the planners of the Grand Concourse to the engineers of the Saw Mill, Bronx, and Hutchinson parkways, this borough has an urban infrastructure that should be the envy of New York.

The Grand Concourse is of course famous for the art deco buildings that line the boulevard as it weaves through the central part of the borough. But what really distinguishes the Concourse is not simply these buildings, but the spaces between and beyond, the Haussmann-like scale of the boulevard. There are other streets in New York City that have similar ensembles of deco buildings and boulevards (Ocean Avenue in Brooklyn comes to mind) but they do not have the grandeur and elegance of the Bronx Concourse.

Likewise, Mosholu Parkway—one of the most underappreciated and majestic boulevards in the city—connects two great open spaces: the Bronx Park (home to the New York Botanical Garden and the Bronx Zoo) and the borough’s largest open space, Van Cortlandt Park. Planned in 1888, it is not a street of great architecture—although Paul Rudolph’s monumental Tracey Towers loom over it—but Mosholu Parkway is still a great landscaped space precisely because it was so carefully and thoughtfully developed in both design and execution.

Though these important urban planning prototypes seem to have been forgotten in recent years as the borough became increasingly suburbanized with the ranch-style homes of Charlotte Gardens, the two-family modular houses of Villa Maria, and the half-timbered Nehemiah housing project, this seems to be turning back to a development pattern based on the borough’s more appropriate historical planning initiatives. The Grand Concourse is currently the focus of an ideas competition sponsored by the Bronx Museum of the Arts and the Design Trust for Public Space to modernize this great boulevard. And Melrose Commons, despite mayoral attempts to weaken its intent and impact over the years, still offers the best hope for a reenergized and repopulated central Bronx. Of course, great architecture would be the icing on the cake in this modernization effort, but only if it builds upon the borough’s proud urban planning tradition.
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design: Gabriele Centazzo
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**THE COMPANY THEY KEEP**

MIPIM, the annual global-real-estate pivot feast, wrapped up on Friday the 13th at the Palais des Festivals in Cannes. Following the money this year were three of architecture’s most illustrious representatives: Zaha Hadid, Thom Mayne, and Wolf Prix. Alex Gorlin, the New York architect with a nose for nonsense, was among the 500 packed into La Salle Estérel in the Palais to witness the trio wax about architectural salvation in “the current economic climate” as if it were a passing thundersorm.

Gorlin was not surprised, Prix said: “Wolf Prix said, ‘If I don’t want to sound like an American, but now is the time to think positive and not get discouraged. There is the danger that a new conservatism will arise with the lack of money, and we will be asked to do stupid forms again!’”

“Zaha fretted that with all this doom and gloom in the air, we risk back-tracking to 20 years ago, when we couldn’t build radical shapes. ‘Remember,’ she said, ‘architectural space leads to enlightenment.’” Thom Mayne was asked by a member of the audience what the present financial crisis meant for the profession. Mayne responded with inadvertent hauteur, ‘We on this panel do not represent the architectural profession, we are like trial lawyers. We are specialists, so we may not be affected as much as others.’ When pressed by the moderator, he conceded: ‘Well, architects will be out of work for many years.’ Just not him.

Gorlin went on to report that lip service was duly paid to finding creative solutions for new problems, even as Hadid quoted out that “we certainly don’t want to go back to designing sheds.” Then Mayne offered without apparent irony (or short-term memory, for that matter), “Now that the Bush era is over, there is interest in new ideas.”

But perhaps the most apropos statement about the age of easy money and expensive stararchitecure was uttered by Frank Gehry, seated in the first row, to Wolf Prix as he left the stage, “You know, all you all talked about was yourselves.” So we end with the pot calling the kettle black.

**THE PULSE OF PEI**

The PULSE Contemporary Art Fair distinguishes itself from the Armory Show, which runs concurrently farther up the Hudson in early March, by promoting its art as “contemporary,” in contrast to the other’s “new” art. The distinction can be fuzzy, just as parody and parodied are sometimes indistinguishable.

That’s what we were pondering while crawling through the PULSE show, when suddenly we came upon a booth hyperbolically hawking The Centurion, a new condominium at 33 West 56th Street designed by the awkwardly named Pei Partnership Architects with I.M. Pei Architect. A giant photomural of Pei and his two sons, Sandi and Didi, beckoned visitors. Considering the context, we were inclined to view it as a conceptual art installation, satirizing the post-bubble demise of extravagant living in designer buildings. We were wrong. A real-estate agent on hand confirmed that this was New York Residence’s third appearance at PULSE, and that they expected to attract the show’s foreign visitors to this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Another agent pined on by announcing that this was the nonagenarian architect’s last building. When our expressions turned quizzical, he quickly clarified: “I mean, he’s going to retire.”

**THE CITY’S PLAN TO SAVE CONEY MIGHT SINK IT FOR GOOD**

“It’s headed for disaster, it’s headed off a cliff,” said Jasper Goldman, senior policy analyst at the Municipal Art Society. He was speaking of the Bloomberg rezoning for Coney Island, which the City Planning Commission will vote on later this spring. The aim is to return the area to its former glory, but recent events bear out, it could be the final shake in Coney’s decades-long death rattle.

The city rezoning includes an amusement district, but also housing, shops, year-round “entertainment retail” (think Chuck E. Cheese), and parkland. Meanwhile, developers Joe Sitt, who has bought up much of the current amusement area, and plans a resort district, but also housing, shops, year-round “entertainment retail” (think Chuck E. Cheese), and parkland. Meanwhile, developer Joe Sitt, who has bought up much of the current amusement area, and plans a resort district, have been wrangling with the City Council representative Dominic Recchia, who holds de facto veto power. And so to shop or stay at the new Coney anyhow.

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**OPEN STORE**

The Amsterdam-based design firm Droog has opened its first American retail space in a 5,000-square-foot, two-story SoHo loft. Created in partnership with fellow Dutch designers Studio Makkink & Bey, the store makes a sophisticated blend of architecture, product design, and merchandizing. Droog asked its designers for an interior composed of elements that could be purchased, and the studio responded with an installation that acts variously as utilitarian product display, demonstration, and architectural folly. The main level is dominated by the House of Blue, a structure made of polyurethane foam with niches that display the store’s witty collection of furnishings, kitchenware, and high-style bric-a-brac. But the foam also serves as a “blueprint” from which customers can order different parts of the house to be custom-fabricated in wood, porcelain, or other materials and produced in limited editions. The baroquey decorated main level contrasts with the more austere lower level, where a wall consists of flat-packed, CNC-milled pieces of furniture that can be assembled into benches, tables, and stools. Throughout, the space echoes the verve of Droog’s products—wallpaper with circular cut-outs that reveal the surface underneath; a bathroom mat that doubles as a slipper—and extends the firm’s ethos of informality and reuse.

**BARELY AFLOAT**

While the two parties wrangle, amusement advocates fear that entertainment retailers will displace traditional rides and arcades. “The plan kills the hen that laid the golden egg,” said Juan Rivero of Save Coney Island, adding that without a sizeable amusement park—closer to 26,000 square feet, rather than the proposed 9,000—no one will come to shop or stay at the new Coney anyhow.

City Hall has been forced to sign off on the plan, but added 20 stipulations, like increasing the retail cap from 2,500 square feet per store but added 20 stipulations, like increasing the retail cap from 2,500 square feet per store to 8,000, or reducing the number of rides, or adding a 25,000 square feet, rather than the proposed 9,000—no one will come to shop or stay at the new Coney anyhow.

The local community board further complicated the city’s gambit when it overwhelmingly voted in favor of the rezoning but added 20 stipulations, like increasing the retail cap from 2,500 square feet per store to 10,000, and abolishing eminent domain. Most points are seen as favorable to the developer, and were crafted by the area’s City Council representative Dominic Recchia, viewed by some as a crony of Sitt.

If the plan gets to the council this summer, Recchia holds de facto veto power. And so to get its plans realized, the city will need to first remove Sitt from the equation. Goldman is skeptical about such a deal because of the dire state of the city’s finances and the bad blood between both sides. “Then again,” he said, “there’s no better time to buy, given market conditions.”

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Designer: Droog and Studio Makkink & Bey
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Designs on the Delaware

Like most cities, Philadelphia is scaling back services amid a budget crunch. But despite austere times, the city is moving ahead with long-brewing plans to redesign its Delaware River waterfront with new parks, promenades, and cultural, residential, and commercial uses. In early March, Mayor Michael Nutter and the William Penn Foundation announced a $1 million commitment for planning, design, and construction of the new waterfront, a pledge that followed a $1 million capital commitment from the city.

While the sum might seem trifling, it sets the stage for implementation of an action plan for the Central Delaware developed in 2007 by numerous civic groups, including PennPraxis, the clinical planning and design arm of the University of Pennsylvania’s School of Design. “In the scheme of things, a million dollars is a baby step, but it’s a very important signal of commitment from the foundation community,” said Harris Steinberg, executive director of PennPraxis. “It’s meant to leverage other funds and eventually, to help catalyze the development community.”

The most important elements of the public access masterplan, which will require approval by the City Council, include acquisition of land for a 200-foot-wide trail and improving access to the waterfront, which is largely inaccessible due to I-95, vast parking lots, and gaps in the street grid. An open RFQ for the masterplan is due for release late this month.

While planning efforts for the entire seven-mile trail and surrounding urban fabric, the funding target is $1 million for construction efforts on Pier 11, for which a second RFQ will soon be announced. The one-acre wooden pier, located adjacent to the Ben Franklin Bridge that connects the city to Camden, New Jersey, is envisioned as a demonstration project. “It will be a template for the kind of high-quality public space we’re seeking for the entire waterfront,” Steinberg said. In any event, it will need to be high quality on a budget. According to PennPraxis, the entire budget for the pier project with design fees is $2.5 million. Of that money, more than $1 million is slated for structural improvements to the pier.

Despite the modest budgets, both RFQs are expected to draw broad interest, and that suits Steinberg just fine. “We hope it will be the beginning of a number of spin-off projects,” he said. “This is the first chapter in an ongoing story.”

ALAN G. BRAKE
DRILLING FOR DOLLARS

In August 2008, Christopher Bianchi began receiving inquiries from energy company Lenape Resources of upstate New York, which expressed interest in prospecting for natural gas on Bianchi’s 21 acres in Gilbertsville, New York, for $100 per acre. About the same time, art critic Silvia Kolbowski and architecture scholar Kenneth Frampton, who spend their weekends at a home on 23 acres in Wayne County, Pennsylvania, filed a similar query from Chesapeake Energy that offered 15 times that rate. Both properties sit atop the Marcellus Shale, a geological formation that extends from West Virginia and Ohio to the Southern Tier of New York, and contains as many as 16 trillion cubic feet of natural gas.

New York State is already home to 13,000 gas wells, according to Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) spokesperson Yancey Roy, and some of those sites drill the Marcellus Shale. The state’s most recent drilling applications, from the likes of Chesapeake Energy and Nornew, take fresh advantage of the Marcellus Shale’s potential. The recent spike in energy prices and access to the Millennium Pipeline have inspired the latest wave of prospecting, and this time round, companies will deploy newer methods of horizontal drilling and hydraulic fracturing to tap into the natural gas deposits.

Hydraulic fracturing is a controversial process. At least a million gallons of water mixed with sand and a proprietary chemical formulation—the details of which are exempted from the Clean Water Act—is injected into the drill site to rupture the rock and release the natural gas trapped in its pores. Although a 2004 study by the Environmental Protection Agency concluded that hydraulic fracturing was effectively safe, groundwater samples drawn from a natural gas field in Sublette County, Wyoming, last year proved that hydraulic fracturing had contaminated it with high levels of benzene and other carcinogens that threaten public health. The Sublette County incident was the first to be recorded by a federal agency; investigations by smaller groups have yielded many more examples of underground contamination, as well as surface spills.

The drilling applications in question would put gas wells not far from one of New York City’s largest drinking-water reservoirs. And while year-round residents of the Southern Tier and rural Pennsylvania might be ambivalent, weekenders from New York City are vocal in their call for more stringent environmental protection. “The question of our relationship to the land, particularly at a moment when the ecological aspects of buildings are at the top of an economic agenda, should not be left only to environmentalists,” Frampton told AN. This constituency has further reason to protest drilling, due to concerns about contamination of New York City’s watershed, the reservoirs of which currently support the population without filtration. City Council environmental committee chair James Gennaro has come out firmly against drilling within the watershed.

Falling energy prices have quieted activity for the moment: Chesapeake Energy recently rescinded its offer to Kolbowski and Frampton. In New York State, many companies are waiting on the DEC as it prepares an environmental impact statement concerning horizontal drilling and hydraulic fracturing, mandated in a bill signed by Governor Paterson last July. The inevitable rebound in prices, though, continues to fuel debate surrounding gas drilling, and currently both sides are staking claims in the fight. In February, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court ruled in favor of a municipality’s right to use zoning to determine drilling locations. Yet also last month, the Environmental Working Group revealed that New York’s DEC has not conducted tests of surface or underground water for contamination by hydraulic fracturing. And according to Joe Levine of New York–based Bone/Levine Architects and co-founder of Damascus Citizens for Sustainability, drilling has just begun at the so-called Robson Well in Wayne County; the Delaware River Basin Commission is deferring jurisdiction on the effort, since the drilling is not technically tapping into the Marcellus Shale. DAVID SOKOL
They don’t build ’em like this anymore. When celebrated silent film and vaudeville impresario Samuel “Roxy” Rothafel commissioned architect Walter Ahlschlager to design a new theater on Broadway and 74th Street in 1927, he asked for something more than a black box. Godfather to such famed movie palaces as the Strand, Rialto, Rivoli, Capitol, his eponymous Roxy Theatre, and, of course, Radio City Music Hall, Rothafel wanted to offer people a fantasy escape. In other words, when the beleaguered urban dweller came in from the hustle and bustle of Broadway, he would be buying a ticket not just to see a flick, but to embark on a magical journey into exotic lands. Ahlschlager fulfilled this promise through a careful manipulation of scale, rich materials and surface treatments, gaudy adornments and amenities, and a profusion of architectural styles that spanned eras from the ancient grandeur of Greek and Rome, through the Renaissance and Rococo periods, all the way to a spice trader’s tent on the Arabian Desert. The final product, known as Roxy’s Midway, was a 2,800-seat cocoon, as opulent as any palace, “leading the architect to see a flick, but to embark on the journey of a lifetime.”

In the ensuing decades, little was done to maintain the original aspect of the theater. The interior was landmarked in 1979. And for the past 20 years or so, it has served as a venue for rock-and-roll concerts. In 2006, Madison Square Garden acquired the theater and finally restored it to its 1929 splendor. To this end, they hired Beyer Blinder Belle (BBB), and dedicated $16 million to renovation costs.

As the architects set to work, they found that no matter what they did to the Beacon over the years, they all took more or less the same approach to maintenance: They just rolled over the prior tenant’s paint with whatever was fashionable or cheap at the time. When the molding cracked, or the spears of the giant Amazon warriors flanking the stage broke, or the golden bird sitting on the throne of the allegorical girl above the exit fell off, they left it that way. And when the crystal ball on the chandelier in the lobby rounda came down, it was reattached with a bit of wire and a coffee tin—painted gold, of course. When people smoked, that smoke coated the walls, burying in grime the murals of Arcadian pastures.

To uncover the original Beacon, BBB explored two main avenues: archival research and an almost archaological technique known as an exposure window. The archival research included trips to the New York Historical Society, where they studied photos of the theater in advertisements from when it first opened and read up on old newspaper articles. The black-and-white photos didn’t reveal much in the way of color, but gave some idea of textures and tones and, in a blowup, revealed a portion of the carpet pattern. The articles painted a picture with a similarly broad brush, describing the Beacon as a “gilded palace,” leading the architects to assume there had been a lot of gold about. The real detail, however, came through exposure windows, a process by which a technician tapes off a square on a wall and carefully strips away layer after layer of paint until only the original remains. This revealed an incredible variety of treatments and colors throughout the space. Almost every surface and every molding had its own color or application. Once these were determined, BBB unleashed an army of 1,000 craftsmen on the Beacon: master plaster workers and fine art painters, marble masons and scagliola workers. The first performer to play the reincarnated Beacon was, poetically enough, Leonard Cohen.
FIVE VIE FOR CIVIL RIGHTS continued from front page

“We will be located next to two more entertainment-oriented institutions—the World of Coca-Cola and the Georgia Aquarium. We asked the teams to create a space that will help visitors transition to a more contemplative state.”

After issuing an RFQ in November 2008, the center and its design jury narrowed the list to twenty. They then asked the firms to submit a “design narrative” and complete team roster. “We didn’t want them to draw anything,” Shipman explained. “We wanted them to demonstrate their way of working.” That group was then winnowed to five teams, who were given a small design stipend and a detailed exhibition design program.

The finalists have responded in strikingly different ways. The team of Diller, Scofidio + Renfro and Stanley Beaman & Sears created a layered design, with much of the exhibition space below grade and a thin, cantilevered roof hanging over an outdoor garden. Freelon and HOK designed a pair of interlocking, L-shaped volumes topped with green roofs. Huff + Gooden and Hammel, Green and Abrahamson presented the most austere scheme: a low-slung horizontal volume with wide expanses of glass, which hangs over the sloping site and is supported by a massive truss. The team of Moody-Nolan, Predock, and Goode Van Slyke engaged directly with the park-side setting, with a building-as-landscape design and a glazed entrance carved out of the middle. Finally, the team of Polshek, Cooper Carry, and Stanley, Love-Stanley called for a collection of glazed, flat-roofed wings with projection screens, accented by a tall, thin, concrete entrance portal.

In addition to evaluating how each design meets aesthetic and programmatic goals, the jury will also consider the environmental sensitivity of the projects, and participation by women- and minority-owned firms. The jury of 13—including civil rights leader Juanita Abernathy, Chelsea Piers founder Tom Bernstein, filmmaker George Wolfe, and architects Alan Balfour, Deborah Berke, and Craig VanDevere—will make its recommendation in late March. The project is expected to break ground late this year.

LAST RITES continued from front page

lawsuit is whether or not St. Vincent’s met the appropriate standards for its hardship application, which the hospital filed after the commission initially voted down its plans last May. That vote denied St. Vincent’s request to demolish the O’Toole Building as part of its bid to build the new tower, along with new condominiums on the current hospital site across 7th Avenue—all of which the commission found historically inappropriate.

The hardship application does not deal with the appropriateness of the designs, but with St. Vincent’s ability to carry out its charitable mission. The hospital argued it could not do so without demolishing the O’Toole Building, and in October, the commission voted in favor of this argument.

The petition, filed by Preserve the Village Historic District and a number of allies, argues primarily that the O’Toole Building still functions as a serviceable building within the hospital complex. But the lawsuit’s chances of success may be slim, several land-use attorneys told AN, because the court usually defers to the governing agency’s decision. “It’s difficult to meet the standard,” one attorney said, “and the commission is sure to dot all its i’s.”

While agreeing that such challenges are difficult, Al Butz, counsel for the preservationists, argued that the legal standard in question dates to the Penn Central suit that saved Grand Central Terminal, a building preserved for the same reasons he said O’Toole should be. “This hardship is self-created by St. Vincent’s.”

Meanwhile, the commission’s approval of the hospital tower—which included concessions by architects Pei Cobb Freed & Partners to reduce the structure’s height, add terra cotta louvers, and activate the ground floor—paved the way for a hearing on the condominiums across the street, plans for which developer Bill Rudin expects to present in the coming months. MC
MINORITY REPORT
continued from front page
A handful of City Council members were wrangling with the Bloomberg and Paterson administrations over the inequitable distribution of stimulus funds, and how best to give women- and minority-owned construction firms a greater share of stimulus projects headed for New York. While the warring parties in Washington managed to reach a compromise on the stimulus, there's been no such luck for councilmembers like Letitia James of Brooklyn, who desperately want some percentage of stimulus funds set aside for minority groups. “Congress members keep telling me it’s in the bill, while industry heads keep telling me it’s not,” James said in a recent interview. “There’s a lot of confusion.”

At the heart of the debate are longstanding construction practices that, according to critics, continue to exclude minority- and women-owned businesses. “There’s a lasting institutional bias,” said John Liu, a Queens representative and the council’s only Asian member. Councilmembers supporting equity measures within state and city stimulus projects were hoping the additional influx of work might also mean an influx of opportunity for their constituents, particularly in high-paying construction-related jobs. But just as architects and planners have been disappointed by the stimulus bill’s relatively modest scope, MWBE supporters have found that the urge to correct decades of economic exclusion has run up against the federal government’s aim to salvage the sputtering economy. State and city officials claim there’s not enough time to tweak the standard formulas used to determine contracts on capital and infrastructure projects. Essentially, these rules call for government agencies to take the lowest bid when authorizing contracts. Councilmembers James, Liu, and others have repeatedly tried to set aside a certain portion of those contracts for minority businesses. The hope was that under the special circumstances of the stimulus, this time they would succeed. So far, it’s not been the case. A spokesperson for Governor David Paterson said that the first priority is “getting the shovelers in the ground, which will benefit all New Yorkers, regardless of race or gender.”

Not everyone is so sanguine. “I do not believe a rising tide raises all boats—it certainly hasn’t in New York,” said Queens councilmember James Sanders, Jr., at a February hearing on MWBE involvement in the stimulus. “Sometimes it floods over here, while there’s a drought over there.” Sanders pointed to the World Trade Center reconstruction as a prime example of a major government project where minority contractors have been all but shut out by their mainstream rivals. Now, with the stimulus bill passed and reports trickling in of projects in motion, James feels it may be too late to secure work for women- and minority-owned firms. “Projects are already getting underway because there are time constraints, and yet there’s still no consensus on whether or not there’s an MWBE requirement or component,” she said. “The moment may have passed. The concern, it seems, is with the overall economy, not the minority community within the overall economy.”

CAN OBAMA CARRIÓN?
First Tom Daschle, now Adolfo Carrión. As if President Barack Obama’s Cabinet picks have not caused him enough problems already, the Daily News reported on March 9 that the former Bronx borough president and newly appointed Director of Urban Affairs did not pay fees to an architect who added a porch and balcony to his home on City Island. Under New York law, the matter might have gone unnoticed had Carrión not signed off on the proposal or not there’s an MWBE requirement or component,” she said. “The moment may have passed. The concern, it seems, is with the overall economy, not the minority community within the overall economy.”

NEW SCHOOL’S OUT
It can be hard proposing the tallest building for a neighborhood, but in Greenwich Village, it is nearly impossible, as the New School recently learned. At a private meeting with elected officials on February 27—details of which were later made public by the Village Residents Alliance, a major opponent of the project—New School representatives admitted that they would not pursue a 350-foot-tall “campus in the sky” designed by Skidmore, Owings & Merrill. Locals objected not only to the structure’s massive scale, but also to its red-and-blue glass facade, which was seen as out of character for the Village. It was not neighborhood opposition, however, but the economic climate that the university blamed for the collapse of the project. SOM has now been charged with designing a smaller, as-of-right educational building for the site, located at 5th Avenue and 14th Street.

TOLLING THE GOWANUS
Even a few years ago, it would have been hard to imagine anyone living on the Gowanus Canal, the once-and-still heavily industrial, heavily polluted rivulet in South Brooklyn. But even in post-bubble New York, such dreams still soar, like Toll Brothers’ plans for a 577-unit mixed-use complex, which have now been approved and to be located on a city-owned brownfield. The proposal, which was opposed by some neighborhood residents because of its scale and perceived threat to local manufacturers, won approval from the City Council on March 12.
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When the new Yankee Stadium opens this month, it will mark a milestone in the Bronx’s long-running resurrection. But in the shadow of such supersized bids for the borough’s rebirth, architects at work on more modest, community-driven developments are finding a range of creative tactics to cultivate a greener, socially sustainable future.

By Angela Starita and Malachi Connolly
Not so long ago, if Neapolitans wanted to describe a place in ruins, they’d reach across the Atlantic for just the right simile: ‘E’ come u Bronx—like the Bronx. That it came to represent urban chaos in Naples, a city renowned for the same, speaks volumes about the Bronx’s stubborn reputation, cast in the 1970s and fixed in pop-cultural memory for decades after.

Today, with the Bloomberg administration raining billions of public-private investment on the borough—a result of the South Bronx Initiative, an interagency effort launched in 2006 to encourage more housing, retail, and local jobs—there is no shortage of big-budget, star-quality projects. The new Yankee Stadium, a revamped Hunts Point Market, and the Gateway Center on the site of the former Bronx Terminal Market are all poised to make a dramatic impact on Bronx fortunes.

At the other end of the spectrum, smaller projects in the borough—receiving less media coverage and funding—have arguably undergirded much of this restoration, with impact far beyond their modest budgets. Be they green roof entrepreneurs, supportive-housing visionaries, or boxing gym designers, architects are transforming the borough one vacant lot or storefront at a time. Working alongside established architects such as Richard Dattner, whose 323-unit Courlandt Corners is among the city’s larger affordable housing developments, they have made the range and reach of community-driven Bronx development more vibrant than ever. And by engaging Bronx residents, they’re connecting the dots between social, environmental, and economic sustainability.

Few grassroots groups understand the synergy between design and community goals as well as Sustainable South Bronx (SSBx). Miquela Craytor, the group’s director, said that the Bronx has become a magnet for green technology because so much of the borough’s negative press centered on its severe pollution and decay. As one of many efforts to reinvent the borough through green design, the group has collaborated with Columbia University’s GSAPP to explore turning Oak Point’s industrial waterfront—where the city had planned to site a new jail—into an eco-industrial park. In 2003, taking matters into its own hands, SSBx started a program to train students to build and maintain green roofs, and four years later founded its own green-roof company, SmartRoofs. That has opened the door to real architectural opportunities.

On a recent afternoon, Craytor and Jesusa Ludan, SmartRoofs’ director, visited a new client’s property: the Olympic Theater in the Longwood neighborhood. Once a cinema for Spanish-language films, the Olympic was bought by Abundant Life Tabernacle and will be remodeled as the church’s new home by architect Ana Maria Torres. Torres, principal of at architects, suggested incorporating more than 12,000 square feet of green roofs into the design, a boon for a neighborhood sorely lacking open space. “This is ambitious, yes, but we’re going to make it,” Torres said as she showed off the project. “The economy is more difficult, so we need to be creative.” She aims to complete the job for $2 million, a budget made possible through so many donations—both of money and labor—from church members.

Adaptive reuse was similarly successful in Mott Haven, a neighborhood south of the theater, where the New York City Housing Authority converted a basketball gym, once a warehouse, into the Betances Community Center and Boxing Gym. The bold design by Stephen Yablon Architect has garnered numerous awards, including a 2009 Merit Award from the AIA New York chapter. Set to open in May, the center consists of the first floor of a housing tower connected to the former warehouse space through an arcade. The central attraction is the ring itself, where children and teenagers are taught the art of boxing in what Yablon called a “glass-enclosed cube”: a triple-height space lined with clerestory windows. Adapting the building involved raising the roof and installing an underground drainage system, but in Yablon’s hands the complex job, as he put it, seems “almost childlike in its simplicity.”

Other architects have literally roamed the gritty streets in search of opportunity. In the early 1990s, Jonathan Kirschenfeld, known for designing New York’s floating swimming pool, decided that the best way to secure commissions for publicly-funded housing was to find sites on his own, study their zoning parameters, and then approach nonprofit groups. “I did a lot of feasibility studies,” he said. “Ultimately, I got to understand who was looking for sites.” With so few parcels remaining, those available are often irregularly shaped and frustrating to work with. But the key, he said, “is to solve the public spaces first.” His project for Bronx Park East, for instance, looks to be a row house from the street, with a double-height common space and adjoining roof terrace. But it’s connected to a seven-story unit set back at an angle, creating a central courtyard between the large and small volumes. The project’s almost sly jump in scale is part of Kirschenfeld’s effort to counter what he called “a lack of faith in urbanism” that marked much of the 1980s housing solutions, including Charlotte Gardens, the 90 single-family houses that make many architects livid. “It kills me, looking for sites in R7 and R8 [medium- to high-density zones] and passing vinyl-sided, one-family houses with wrought-iron fences,” he said. Kirschenfeld now has company in his quest to urbanize the Bronx’s low-density pockets. The Women’s Housing & Economic Development Corporation was granted a triangular site at Intervale Avenue to build a 127-unit building, with a third of its apartments set aside for formerly homeless families. Dubbed Intervale Green, the buildings sit just a block away from Charlotte Street, where a 1977 visit from President Jimmy Carter brought worldwide attention to burned-out buildings and rampant crime. Constructed on a former brownfield, Intervale Green’s three
Architect Jonathan Kirschenfeld has multiple housing projects (models, above) underway in the Bronx that he co-developed with such groups as the Postgraduate Center for Mental Health after scouting sites on his own. A new home for the Abundant Life Tabernacle (left) is being carved out of an abandoned theater in Longwood by architect Ana Maria Torres, with the former fly space transformed into community rooms, and an extensive green-roof installation.
green roofs and two courtyards have already proven a hit. New resident Carolina Beltre plans to share her one-bedroom apartment with her ten-year-old son, whom she left in the Dominican Republic five years ago in search of better work. “It’s a new beginning for this area,” she said. “Everybody needs to know what’s happening in the South Bronx.”

Even some of the largest Bronx developments are taking cues from their smaller siblings. Though the neighborhood around Yankee Stadium has rarely shared its team’s success, planners are applying a whopping injection of urban acupuncture to the area: The new stadium will be followed by a big-box shopping mall called the Gateway Center at Bronx Terminal Market. Just down River Avenue from the stadium, the center juggles multiple roles as it links the neighborhood to a planned Harlem River park across the Major Deegan Expressway. The project was conceived to accommodate two vastly different scales of experience,” explained Gregory Cranford, partner at BBG Architects. “You have the highway scale—as the building would be experienced from the Major Deegan—and then the pedestrian scale.” Though community groups criticized the project for displacing two-dozen wholesale produce merchants, the architects strove to knit what could have been another blank box into the neighborhood. The mass is broken into urban blocks, with two pedestrian passageways leading toward the river, and incorporates a historic market structure. “(City Planning Director) Amanda Burden was adamant about the pedestrian nature of this development,” Cranford explained. “We worked closely to really anchor the pedestrian experience.”

A similar debate over an influx of new retail has played out in the east side of the borough, where the Bloomberg administration aims to make the Third Avenue corridor an economic catalyst, anchored on the north by Boricua Village, the mixed-use project built around a vertical campus for Boricua College. The area is also home to Melrose Commons, a housing development that galvanized the neighborhood in 1992 when local residents deemed the initial plans unresponsive to their needs. This resulted in the community group Nos Quedamos (We Stay), formed to counter the shortcomings of the Melrose project—whose finished form is now seen as a model of cooperative design. The city aims to attract more name retailers to the area, a goal that Yolanda Gonzalez, executive director of Nos Quedamos, said is reasonable, but not at the expense of what she called the mama-and-papa stores that have long been neighborhood mainstays. The most successful projects, Gonzalez stressed, are those that give community groups a strong voice in the design process. That’s what has made the borough’s smallest new developments its most exuberant, a lesson planners would do well to heed as the Bronx continues to rebound. “There hasn’t been a lot of sit-down and get-together, and that is an issue,” Gonzalez said about the city’s Third Avenue plans. “It should be a collaboration that creates cohesiveness. It’s important.”

ANGELA STARITA WRITEs FReQUENTLY ON URBAN DESIGN AND ARCHITECTURE. MALACHI CONNOLLY IS AN ARCHITECT AT RKT&B IN NEW YORK.
THE ARCHITECT’S NEWSPAPER APRIL 1, 2009

APRIL 2009

WEDNESDAY 1

LECTURES

Donald K. Emmerson, Ellen L. Frost, John D. Ciocciari
A Gathering Storm? The Politics of Recessions in Southeast Asia
6:00 p.m.
Asia Society
725 Park Ave.
www.asiasociety.org

HENNING KALAND

Detour: Code architectu
7:00 p.m.
Urban Center
457 Madison Ave.
www.architecture.org

THRUDES 2

LECTURES

Billie Tsien
Women’s Work is Never Done
6:30 p.m.
Cooper Union
Great Hall
7 East 7th St.
www.cooper.edu

THURSDAY 4

EXHIBITION OPENING

Drawing Out: Student Artwork from Drawing Connections
Drawing Room
35 Wooster St.
www.drawingcenter.org

SATURDAY 6

LECTURE

Jennifer Gray
From Thonet to Pouvé: Modern Industrial Design, 1880-1945
1:00 p.m.
Urban Center
6:30 p.m.

LECTURE

Carol O’Connor
Modern Design, the latest exhibition on view at the Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, features 70 felt works from 70 architects, showing that the recent popularity of felt owes something to both its tactile and sustainable appeal. Highlighting the multifarious roles that felt plays in contemporary design, the latest exhibition on view at the Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum features 70 felt works from a variety of fields, including fashion, architecture, product design, and home furnishings. Moving from the material’s ancient origins—it is believed to be among the first man-made textiles—to its contemporary status as chic interior cladding, the exhibition explores the enduring allure of mat-ted wool. In one standout project, the experimental Central Public Library in Amsterdam (2007, detail above), architect Jo Coenen & Co. employed hand-felted Claudia Jongstra to design felt wall mats made of wool and silk, providing texture and intrigue to the library’s entrance hall. Elsewhere in the exhibition are site-specific installations by Jongstra, who creates wraparound felt enclosures, and Washington State-based fiber artist Janica Arnold, who presents a yurt made out of Merino wool, silk, and metal fibers, and silver fabric, remaking the circular tent dwelling as a space of celebration. The exhibit includes plenty of touch samples, as well as a selection of wools made from recycled materials, showing that the recent popularity of felt owes something to both its tactile and sustainable appeal.

THURSDAY 7

LECTURE

Ted Dwain
Sculpture III
1:00 p.m.
Urban Center
6:30 p.m.

EXHIBITION OPENING

 make it Work: Engineering Experiments
1:00 p.m.
Center for Architecture
536 LaGuardia Pl.
www.aiach.org

MONDAY 13

LECTURES

John Palmieri
Urban Design and Community Development Policy in the Post-9/11 Era
1:00 p.m.
Harvard Graduate School of Design
48 Quincy St., Cambridge, MA
www.gsd.harvard.edu

SUNDAY 13

LECTURE

Abigail Rorer
The Hilton New York
1:30 p.m.

EXHIBITION OPENING

New York’s Hidden Treasures Revealed
City through images of disappearance, in particular the city’s ever-shifting landscape. In his work Untitled 46th Ave. Brooklyn, Construction (2007, above), he photographs a rising tower at an early stage, documenting the intricate steel superstructure while at the same time underscoring the suburbanization of New York—one of the artist’s preoccupations. Featuring primarily color prints consisting of single-image blowups and composite images that capture buildings and people in transition, the show’s blurred views and strange saturations often seem more 1970s than present-day. But as he assembles his oft-handled views, Cohen captures the haunting moment when the present fades into the past. Also included here are three short films shot on 16mm and Super 8 film: Little Flags (2000), NYC Weights, and a selection of wools made from recycled materials, showing that the recent popularity of felt owes something to both its tactile and sustainable appeal.
Thirty-eight-year-old Fernando Romero has ascended to international prominence in architecture with uncommon speed. In three years of work for Rem Koolhaas and OMA, the Mexico City native was project manager for the Casa da Musica in Portugal, whose design is notably based on the scheme for an unrealized Rotterdam villa, enlarged five times and functionally repurposed. In 1999, one year of work for Rem Koolhaas and OMA, the Mexico City native was project manager for the Casa da Musica in Portugal, whose design is notably based on the scheme for an unrealized Rotterdam villa, enlarged five times and functionally repurposed. In 1999, one year before leaving OMA, Romero opened his own Mexico City–based firm, now called LAR, Laboratory of Architecture. Pittsburgh’s Heinz Architectural Center is presenting what they describe as the first monographic exhibition of Romero’s work, with both well-published and lesser-known works documenting his continuing trajectory and evolution. Curator Raymund Ryan divides the show into four categories—orthogonal, non-orthogonal, organic, and communal—with nearly transparent scrims reshaping some of the otherwise-rectilinear galleries to harmonize with non-orthogonally and organically shaped projects. Meanwhile, communal projects are displayed in HAC’s long gallery, which Ryan has wryly dubbed the “research corridor.” A few small architectural projects fit this category, but the section focuses on ZMVM, his study of the greater Mexico City region, and Hyperborder, his recent investigation of the U.S./Mexico border. Both projects recall Koolhaas’ well-known data- and image-intensive studies. In this gallery setting, Romero’s narratives and diagrams are mounted as grafts of wallpaper over the HAC’s insistently postmodern gallery walls. The approach suits the saturating nature of the Information Age, but doesn’t make the Koolhaasian explosion of data, images, and text particularly digestible for the typically brief attention span of the museum visitor.

Most other projects in the show, though, suffer a shortage of information. In comparison to Hyperborder, the model-only representation of the Museum Bridge Mexico/USA project seems reticent. Brief text is available in the gallery guide, but documentary drawings are absent, as are the frenetic programming breakdowns, “to finance the Research Corridor.” A few small architectural projects fit this category, but the section focuses on ZMVM, his study of the greater Mexico City region, and Hyperborder, his recent investigation of the U.S./Mexico border. Both projects recall Koolhaas’ well-known data- and image-intensive studies. In this gallery setting, Romero’s narratives and diagrams are mounted as grafts of wallpaper over the HAC’s insistently postmodern gallery walls. The approach suits the saturating nature of the Information Age, but doesn’t make the Koolhaasian explosion of data, images, and text particularly digestible for the typically brief attention span of the museum visitor.

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Barbs from the Beyond

The Philip Johnson Tapes: Interviews by Robert A.M. Stern
Edited by Kazys Varnelis
Monacelli Press, $40.00

Interviews by Robert A.M. Stern

A 1930 portrait of Johnson by Helmar Lerski.

The Philip Johnson Tapes: Interviews by Robert A.M. Stern

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Thirty-eight-year-old Fernando Romero has ascended to international prominence in architecture with uncommon speed. In three years of work for Rem Koolhaas and OMA, the Mexico City native was project manager for the Casa da Musica in Portugal, whose design is notably based on the scheme for an unrealized Rotterdam villa, enlarged five times and functional—though suffering yet another about-face in his Deconstructivist Architecture show at MoMA of 1988. That these interviews were recorded with the understanding they would be published posthumously accounts for their often outrageous and unrestrained character. Since his death in 2005 at the age of 98, Johnson has largely disappeared from the contemporary dialogue on architecture, except among those who, like Stern, personally knew or benefited from his largesse. He is remembered more for his influence as a critic and curator through his platform at MoMA (personally funding the Architecture Department and early exhibitions) and for his connections among the movers and shakers of architectural patronage.

The Philip Johnson Tapes: Interviews by Robert A.M. Stern is a curious time capsule from 1985. Ronald Reagan was president, Communism had yet to collapse, Madonna was on her first “Virgin” world tour, and Robert A.M. Stern was just a callow youth. Stern has built little, and was perhaps best known for his outrageous postmodern Llewelyn Park pool house with its chrome palm trees. Philip Johnson, on the other hand, at age 79 was considered by many to be at the end of his career. He had completed the now-derided Pittsburgh Plate Glass Building, as well as the AT&T Building and the faux-Dutch Republic Bank in Houston, in complete apostasy from his high-modern Miesian period of the 1950s, when he produced his best work. Of course, Johnson surprised everyone and lived another twenty years, in that time sponsoring yet another about-face in his Deconstructivist Architecture show at MoMA of 1988. That these interviews were recorded with the understanding they would be published posthumously accounts for their often outrageous and unrestrained character. Since his death in 2005 at the age of 98, Johnson has largely disappeared from the contemporary dialogue on architecture, except among those who, like Stern, personally knew or benefited from his largesse. He is remembered more for his influence as a critic and curator through his platform at MoMA (personally funding the Architecture Department and early exhibitions) and for his connections among the movers and shakers of architectural patronage.

This book does little to bolster his reputation; it tends to confirm Johnson as a shallow stylist who used great wealth and charm to maneuver in and out of numerous “nervous breakdowns,” to finance extended European sex tours in the steps of Christopher Isherwood’s Goodbye to Berlin, and to...
seems to be a bit rushed as well. Romero seems an architect in a hurry. This exhibition welded skeleton model on display, though, is only the project from models rather than drawings. The design, built by traditional craftsmen who executed and tectonically adventurous for its use of digital gem-like form, is both aesthetically compelling Las Lomas district of Mexico City, with its faceted, scape of stacked hexagonal tiles.

For that matter, a project such as the Villa S in the Las Lomas district of Mexico City, with its faceted, gem-like form, is both aesthetically compelling and tectonically adventurous for its use of digital design, built by traditional craftsmen who executed the project from models rather than drawings. The welded skeleton model on display, though, is only comprehensible with material from Romero’s monograph and lectures.

With such a profusion of work in such a short time, Romero seems an architect in a hurry. This exhibition seems to be a bit rushed as well.

CHARLES ROSENBLUM IS A PITTSBURGH-BASED ART AND DESIGN CRITIC.

BARBS FROM THE BEYOND continued from page 17 secure his own private architectural commissions. The con-

versations revolve around whom Johnson knew and how he got this or that job, and allude to his public embrace of Fascist poli-
tics of the 1930s, with Johnson mentioning Hitler a number of times in not unflattering terms. Stern lets these references mostly go unchallenged, raising the question of whether Stern wanted Johnson to hang himself, or if he was being polite. Apart from marquee names, as with Dante one needs a glossary to tell Ugalino from Oud, so the publisher has included footnotes to help the uninitiated dis-

tinguish who’s who in this opaque world of the past. What is more remarkable than any single statement by Johnson is the realization here as a kind of grizzled griot—an African story-
teller who is keeper of an oral tradition. Johnson was so old that he was a literal connection to the founding fathers of modernism, and was one himself through his Modern Architecture: International Exhibition of 1932 at MoMA. He was a colleague to Mies, Wright, Le Corbusier, and Gropius.

On the other hand, Stern, who admits he is a longtime friend of Johnson when these interviews take place, appears both bewitched and beguiled by the subject of his interview. Stern engages him in a non-confrontation al, Larry King-style interview, more of a conversation, and rarely questions any of Johnson’s dubious statements. Johnson so often contradicts him-

self, even in the same sentence, that by the middle of the book it is hard to believe much that he says. Knowing Johnson’s sly and Machiavellian nature, one attributes this not to age but to his belief that history belongs to the conquerors, as most of his barbs are aimed at the dead. He seems to have hated almost every architectural contempo-

rary, with the exception of Mies, and above all was fascinated by those with great wealth. Of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, he says: “She was a woman of position and power at birth, so I was in awe.” His antag-

onisms create some ridiculous pronounce-

ments, such as, “Eero and I were very, very peculiar friends. We both respected each other enormously throughout our lives, but neither of us thought very much of the other’s work. I guess we were both right.” As it happens, Saarinen’s star has steadily risen, while estimation of Johnson’s built work has severely declined. On Paul Rudolph: “He’s apparently gone com-

pletely to seed now and become grossly fat, with terribly blotchy skin... And so he’s sort of disappeared now.” Stern does not dispute this. Of course, history has reversed itself and Stern, as dean at Yale, has overseen the restoration of Rudolph’s once revered Art and Architecture Building.

As to the vitriol in those sessions, we really shouldn’t be surprised. After all, this is the man who once said of Frank Lloyd Wright: “I know he is still alive and I thought, therefore, that this in a sense is the right time to speak out, because were he dead, the good’ would tie my mouth—and I don’t want to wait until that time and have to make only pleasant statements.”

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Before he read, Auster confessed he never understood the interest of architects in his work, but described his own long fascination with Mumford. “I first read The City in History in my early 20s,” he said. “The book was a revelation to me, offering a new perspective on just about everything. Mumford was both a deep and broad thinker; a very rare combination; a delicate writer; a passionate humanist; and a fearless articulator of his own original insights. He writes about human beings both from the outside and the inside.” It was a description that could be applied to the novelist himself. But it was Michael Sorkin’s introduction, reprinted here, that perhaps best pinpointed the liaison between literal and imaginative urbanism.

Paul Auster is a master of the topological novel. His remarkable popularity among architects and urbanists truly springs from the spatial preoccupations that infuse his work, a quality it shares with such cartographers as Calvino, Borges, Robbe-Grillet, Hitchcock, Chandler, Kafka, Poe, and other designers of habitats for the nearly invisible. Each of Auster’s books provides a set of calipers, a measuring instrument for both the palpable and the metaphysical dimensions of space. That space more often than not is New York, an immense Rosetta Stone for decoding motive and meaning. Is there a more direct and compelling image of translation or a more succinct metaphor for the way cities produce meanings than the series of strolls taken by Peter Stillman in City of Glass, in which the blocks of the city become the tablet on which, letter by letter, words are spelled out for the pursuing detective, Quinn? The urban unconscious is structured as language and pattern. Space is character.

Despite the seemingly purposeful drive of these two walkers, the pervasive and much-observed importance of chance and coincidence in Auster’s work also firmly links his project to the city. Cities are accident machines, generators of random encounters with people, places, objects, and self. Life as lived or constructed builds a narrative route through this collusion of unexpected and familiar events. Auster has a remarkably fine sense of the Janus of liberation and nightmare that these accidents engender. His power as a storyteller is both in constructing a singularity—one passage through time, space, and emotion—and in throwing it into radical doubt, a condition of unreliability that loops back to reveal the ultimate unknowability of the city itself. That Auster’s work so teems with allusion and filiation and with the intertextual also evokes a remarkably urban condition. The clarity of Auster’s own relationship to specific forms, incidents, and authors refracts this recombinant urbanity into colors both strange and familiar. Behind this spectral variety, there is an umbra of noir. Auster’s deep immersion in the detective novel does not simply produce a city as a set of suspicious behaviors, clues, dead-ends, and pregnant enigma; it locates it at the crumbling reaches of modernity, the limits of the rational city produced by the fragile clarities of deduction. As with any confirmed New Yorker, Auster fills this landscape with scenes of alternative “life styles,” roadmaps to escape. In his frequent evocations of Theravadian isolation and self-reliance—snug houses in Vermont, caves in the Western desert, concealing thickets in Central Park, imaginary countries in South America, or just cars on the road—his novels are deeply utopian and constantly threatened, as utopias will, to lapse into nightmare. Walden easily becomes the Unabomber’s hut. Auster is brilliant at evoking our contemporary urban dystopia: lives without money, confined to single rooms; the stable balance of human relations torn apart or imprisoned by numbing regularity. He is a lapidary recorder of our anxieties, from the petty annoyances of the everyday, to insomniaic nights, to the maw of loneliness, to the scary fluidity of identity, to the always lurking possibility of cataclysm.

Perhaps the reason so many Auster characters wind up in Brooklyn is the search for that elusive mental Arden that the borough seems to represent, a touchstone of the author’s fundamental optimism. Auster inhabits our city, its bars and stations, bookshops and subways, its parks and sidewalks, its Chinese restaurants and candy stores, with a typical New Yorker’s sense that in the recursive folds of the city, the universe is embedded. And it’s a universe and a city that produces not just fear and trembling but sublime joys, the intensities of love and friendship, the pleasures of the street, the satisfactions of a cup of coffee or a good cigar—the happy accidents that are the great gifts of good city life. Auster reads the city to write it; he is one of our most creative urbanists.
Paul Auster delivered the sixth economic theorist. On March Harvey, the geographer and of Bogotá, Colombia, and David Peñalosa, the former mayor of speakers including Enrique director, and launched with a Sorkin, the graduate program’s was founded in 2004 by Michael students of both. The series for urbanists, architects, and an intellectual rite of spring Architecture, the annual Lewis York’s School of Architecture, Program in Urban Design Organized by the Graduate

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