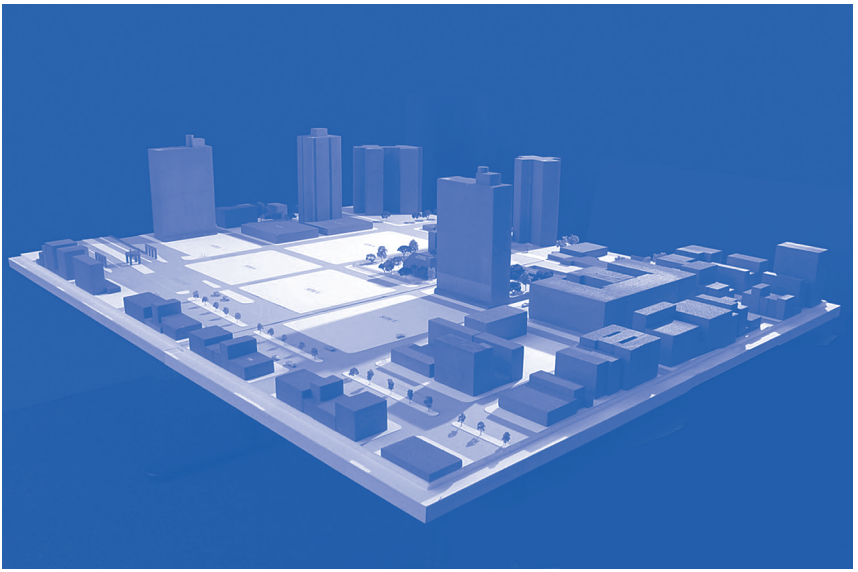

SPURA, view looking southeast.

Origins of Displacement

During the 1970s and 80s, the largest landlords in NYC were the NYC Housing Authority (NYCHA) and the Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD). They controlled more apartments than anybody else. The housing preservation and development were never about preserving and developing. For instance, the HPD controlled 100,000 vacant units in the late 1970s and through the 80s; and yet, the majority of these buildings were sitting vacant, boarded up, cinder blocked up, roofs were exposed. When local community groups would say we need to put tarps on these buildings to preserve them from deteriorating, they [HPD] weren't interested in that. They were pretty much "land banking" a lot of the buildings they had taken. They were holding them for a better day, which eventually did come when they brokered these buildings to bigger fish. The kind of the "macro" of the situation regarding displacement as it relates to the city is that HPD in the 70s…. We're now getting into the issues of displacement and why that actually occurred, that is a whole other question – but in any case, the city was maintaining a number of these properties, as the biggest landlord, and they had taken these from numerous small owners – I say 'taken' because the process through which HPD acquired those buildings was a court proceeding – the in-rent process. HPD, which didn't exist prior to the late 70s, was set up in order to take properties that were considered in, you know, dire condition, back taxes and so forth, but through a synergy of effects in communities like the south Bronx where local small owners could no longer refinance their house because banks began the process of redlining in certain areas. Whole neighborhoods were allowed to crash, and this is all well documented. So HPD came into play to bring a lot of these small owners for the first time in maybe 30 or 40 years, as local families typically refinanced their house to maintain them, and suddenly they were told they couldn't do it anymore. So the pressures began to increase on these small owners to maintain their houses, so HPD comes into play, the landlords are brought to court and lost their buildings to the in-rent process – disguised process of appropriation on the part of a public agency (HPD) to transfer a huge amount of properties, so that HPD became the biggest landlord in NYC. This is throughout NYC.

Was there an ideological reason or was it just to make money later?

That depends how you look at it. From my perspective, the origins of displacement and homelessness had less to do with purely economic motives. There were economic motives there, and maybe plans to broker these buildings to better off more wealthy owners later on – because that is what essentially happened over the course of 20 years – but there were also motives of social control. These motives can particularly be located in various studies, one for instance is the Kerner commission report (1968). By 1967 there were urban uprisings in seven cities across the country. They led in part to the creation of a federal commission, the Kerner commission, which was in fact a commission on civil disorder. Their study of civil disorder, their conclusion is in their final report in 1968, chapter 17 on Housing… so now we're dealing with the whole question of housing within the context of civil disorder – the report recommended the dispersal of the urban poor from urban centers. I am partly speculating on some of this, but that report of the commission was dominated by military and police officials. But in any case, the HPD, the public housing agency in NYC was set up to essentially corral all these buildings that had become abandoned.

Process of Force

The whole question of urban terrain as contested terrain began to become clear to me and began to articulate the notion that the land that people were living on – and they were generally mystified about the processes that took place behind the scenes… you'll hear people say for instance: 'Well, I've lived here for 30 years, and it used to be a stable neighborhood, and everything started to go down' – because the processes behind disinvestment is a synergy of effects. Rodrick Wallace, who is a researcher who has done a lot of work on this area, has mapped this out most clearly; he likened the process of displacement (the term that we use, is 'spatial deconcentration') to an epidemic. He is an epidemiologist, and his studies are fascinating in terms of the language that he uses to describe the way in which these areas were depopulated. You would see pictures of the streets of South Bronx, piles of debris and garbage and generally attribute that to, you know, poor people like to live in this way, or that fireboxes were being pulled out cause junkies… there was a market for fireboxes, so people were ripping them out of the sidewalk. But as Rodrick Wallace documents… and he was able to actually predict neighborhoods that were going to

burn based on the movement of these various sectors. You could tell what neighborhoods were undergoing a kind of pre-speculative process of displacement through the sanitation, fire department, and various other aspects that come into play in terms of neighborhoods going down… So the question for me as an organizer was to demystify these processes, to make people aware of these processes, and that there was literally a process of force and targeting happening on the part of the social system they were living within that had to do with the very ability to maintain their homes… And again from a more ideological point of view, the attack on these communities was meant to disempower. Based on this Kerner commission report study, which was very clear about the causes of disorder: "there are too many poor people banding together and organizing and so forth, and god forbid that they would think they should occupy those buildings directly or taking landlords – bypassing the potential good will of landlords and seizing the properties".

Urban space contested

I became an advocate of direct occupation of vacant spaces on the part of poor people, seeing that by 1980 and Reaganism, what the federal government outlaid for low income housing was literally zero; that the whole euphemism of low income housing no longer exists because no one is constructing housing for low income people. The housing that is being constructed now for low income people are prisons, homeless shelters. The SRO (single room occupancy) in NYC is completely eliminated. Concurrently HPD was, into the '90s vesting itself of its properties because the speculation and gentrification began to make major strides in various neighborhoods. So all those buildings that were formerly abandoned were now being swept up by real estate, and neighborhoods were being consolidated by an influx of a new class of people and those people who were still hanging on were subject to intense pressures to leave through various means. So the idea that urban space is contested, that the process of speculation and profiteering on land is ongoing, that no one is ever truly safe… It is not a stable situation; it is an endless dynamic situation, regardless of what your condition is. So people are always afraid that some bigger fish comes along, and you know, they are only renting, so – imagine… So basically the only way to maintain that property from a theoretical point of view is to stop… to hold this dynamic of speculation away, that could be only done for people to seize it, to occupy vacant spaces.

Spectacle Empty Lots

My first experience with vacant lots was at 139th street in the Bronx. We took a vacant lot, and we started cleaning it up. We didn't have any permits and, through the good graces of a church on Madison Avenue who gave us a grant to go in there and make a park… And don't forget, this neighborhood was synonymous with urban poverty. President Carter, the pope, all came in our street; it was a spectacle. People were interested, they were concerned, tourists would come through, and they were shocked. This was like major devastation. People would refer to these lots as "bombed out" areas and this resonated with our analysis – don't forget the Kerner commission report, which advocated dispersal, was dominated by military and police people and it was about civil disorder… so we saw the attack on housing as synonymous to clearing villages of insurgents.

Social Control, FEMA and NCH

So there were a number of different causes, everything from de-institutionalization of mental institutions to the spatial deconcentration of poor areas, abandonment, and so on… that were – again, from my perspective – about social control. When FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) was set up in 1997 to manage among other things natural disasters, we saw in New Orleans that they are very good at organizing the displacement of populations, and that is what they do. More than about dealing with the ill effects of the flood in New Orleans, they were about organizing transportation away, and that is what they are set up to do. So they charter in man-made emergencies. FEMA oversees the shelter system for homeless people nationally. They were set up along with the National Coalition for the Homeless (NCH), which (don't get me wrong, there are a number of well-meaning people, involved in homeless advocacy as part of these coalition for the homeless type organizations…)

Right to Housing or Shelter

The NCH here in NYC sued the municipality under the Right to Shelter approach. Homeless people that were becoming more prevalent at this time had a "right to shelter" or a "right to housing" in the New York State constitution, unlike the federal constitution or the constitution of other states. New York State allows for the right to housing as separate and distinct from the right to shelter. But the right to shelter was what the NCH sued under, thereby legalizing the placement of thousands

of people within barrack style so-called shelters, which up to that point were illegal under warrant of habitability laws. You couldn't legally put a person on a cot inside a gymnasium, where the incidence of AIDS and TB [tuberculosis] was at least twice the average. You had to provide housing. But under the right to shelter [law]suit, it allowed for barrack style shelters, which were unheard of anywhere else in the world. So the legislative capability for the shelter system was created through what I would consider a massive instance of bad law known as this right to shelter suit. What this suit effectively did, was not correct some power imbalance that existed, but constituted and legitimized a decentralization of power and a lower standard for the housing. More specifically, what it allowed for was the placing of thousands of people within barrack style shelters, which up to that point were not legal.

50/50 & 80/20

Something is better than nothing, but here in the LES we were fighting to maintain the housing that was still standing. We wanted all these buildings renovated for low-income housing. The community board should stand firm and demand that these houses were set aside for the creation of low-income housing. The best of the housing organizations in the LES at that point could go for was referred to as the 50/50 plan that was put forth by the city: 50 percent of the vacant buildings would go for low-income housing and the other 50 percent would be made available for market rate housing. This is the mid and late eighties, and there were a lot of abandoned buildings here. And then it became the 80/20 plan (80 percent market ratehousing). They made deals with some of the housing organizations: these are the kind of things that go on.

50/50 is also the claim for the SPURA development at this point. Actually it is not really 50 percent, because 50 percent is market value, and then the other 50 percent is portioned out amongst low, medium and then…?

Yes, that tactic has a long history. They call it the "cross subsidy plan", which means "we can't, there is no money to build housing for poor people, but if we build the market value housing, then there will be some money to do the other part for poor people." We call it the "double cross subsidy plan." And it became then 80/20. Once you allow, when you deregulate, when you open up hundreds of abandoned buildings, which were strewn around in the LES… "The best we can do is 50/50", said the

community boards and the kinds of local council people… We were saying: "No. Poor people: take the buildings now it is the only way. This neighborhood is going to become super-gentrified." And we were saying this in the mid-eighties.

Empty Lots Blank Canvases

During that time there was a lot of spontaneous coming together. I am talking '84, '85, and '86. There were a lot of people who were here, primarily Latino people, and they were seizing vacant lots, spontaneously seizing the land. It is a bit of a charged language, but they were basically. It is a beautiful thing, really, cleaning things up, making stuff. That's why it was so interesting for me to work with artists when we did this, because it was really one big canvas… that is how I always saw this neighborhood.

Well, it's about shifting the way that something is understood. Like representationally, it is about creating a surface of appearance over a building that challenges the dominant paradigm. Art can do that, and the way I understand it, it is a rupture of representation.

But there are lots of abandoned, massive vacancies throughout the city now: empty condos, empty foreclosed housing, all kinds of empty spaces around. So by reinstating an approach that allows for people to legally work on these through their own sweat and get a home… There was no other way to do this, so we occupied somewhere in the neighborhood of thirty buildings and organized groups to renovate them. The 'we' was this heterogeneous mass of people moving on buildings on A Street between B and C, right off Tomkins square park. At some point we had eight buildings going, so you can imagine on a Saturday morning there was people in the streets… the sense that you could interact horizontally with people, it allowed for a certain kind of interaction, a community that might not be there, generally, but people, tools, just working on stuff… And it's a world wide phenomenon: three-fourths of the world's poor, according to the Office of Human Settlements at the UN [United Nations], live in houses they made themselves. So, most poor people have created the housing they live in.

Squatters' Movement

We didn't think about affecting policy. We had no mechanism, desire. It would have been good if some of the housing organizations – and I say this in hindsight – because the housing movement, and the

left generally, didn't support us. They generally believe that the state has a responsibility to provide the housing and that we were usurping that, because our argument was: a) it was self-evident that they weren't doing that, b) what we were doing could be the bad cop to their good cop. They could go in and demand subsidies and kind of so and so forth based on the fact that "people are taking these buildings, so you'd better deal with us." We were creating more negotiating space for them, but they weren't into it. A number of these groups received HPD community consultant contracts. So it was opportunism, antagonism, fatalism, but it didn't matter to us because we understood clearly what it was about. We were opposing the destructive force of speculation and gentrification with a moral force and a level of physical force in terms of defending it through barricades, organized mass pressure on the streets to keep our homes. And we had no illusions about trying to shift policy or soften the pharaoh's heart. You know people do public squatting, protesting, threatening, too, but that was apples to our pears. Our thing is clandestine. We are not into grand standing, we are into creating groups that can maintain a level of quiet for 3-4 months, get mail, start to secure the building from the inside so other people couldn't get in, and then go public. And then fight it from there with a minimum amount of legal cover. And organize from political support, horizontal support from within the community, local institutional support, and then utilize the media.

Now this is the time for mass occupations. Right now. 2011. So we are organizing around that currently. We have O4O (Organizing for Occupations) to create an infrastructure citywide for mass occupations of vacant spaces, condos and lock ups, foreclosed houses, and so forth. Because the need is there, clearly. There is no reason that people should not be occupying these houses, as well as defending those people that have decided not to leave. Because the foreclosure process takes a couple of years. There is a period of time before the people actually leave when they are actually tenants in the house they formerly owned. So we are trying to suggest that people stay in their house as a squatter in their formerly owned house and organize for defense… which, plain and simple, has to do with getting a lot of the people from the community in the house, forcing the hand of the bank to bring marshals and so on. You need to make explicit what is implicit in their eviction, in their call to evict you… well, flesh that out. What do you mean by that? In other words, what do you got? Put your hand on the table. You bring

one marshal in the house; we have a hundred of people ready to defend *Mr. and Mrs. So and So* because they are not leaving. So NYPD and Bloomberg start calculating, and we… we have 20 houses in that condition… so they are going to want to negotiate. They'll come up with something. They have to adjust their approach; they are going to try to co-opt it, pacify it. Until people move, they are not getting anything.

We are not criminals; we are adding flesh to the otherwise abstract notion of housing as a human right, making it real – rather than just some kind of abstraction… It is a common sense approach to housing as opposed to this bureaucratic approach.

Architects + Community

From what I read these Community Boards have worked better then they have in the past, partially because there were moderators from the CB3 who were trying to moderate things happening with the audience and the panel. Trying to make it clear, to explain in plain English what the process was. So at least they understood what the issues were.

GOLES was advocating for more affordable housing, I think right now it is a 50/50 mix, and they were advocating for 60/40 as high as they could get it. In fact 50/50 was higher then anybody expected it to be. It was expected 60/40 the other direction. 40% affordable and 60% market rate.

There is a lot of scrutiny on this land, the issue has been brewing for 50 years and it was sort of surprising that a proposal was pushed through for the last year. It was really the urgency of the community board that decided to pushed it through – let's come up with a plan to do this – and they talked to the HPD and to the city, and then they really decided it was the right time.

Do you know a lot about this site?

We only have rough information about this site. A community that had been here before that has been displaced with the promise that new housing would be built there, and in the 70s the money sort of disappeared, so it didn't happen.

The first coops built in the area were pre-war and they were developed as coops for Union. The East

river coops were developed in the early 50's and then Stuart Park in the late 50s, all by the same developer, a non-profit developer United Housing Foundation. They were trying to build good housing stock for Union workers and the union backed the loans for the property. There weren't so many tenements houses at the river, so that has been easier land to grab; there were warehouses, so there wasn't a lot of displacement. But for the Seward park coops, several blocks of tenements were destroyed, but also a lot of those families moved back in.

Some people say the Seward Park Coops, specifically, are a good model to look at for the site now, and I was wondering what your opinion might be?

Compared to SPURA? Actually after Seward Park was developed they continued on across the street and cleared out all these tenements. All this was done under the title One Land Act - something Robert Moses set up - which allowed Government agencies or the city to clear out the slums for hygiene and safety and access and improved infrastructure, and then to displace those residents. The reason SPURA became an issue is that the housing that was cleared away wasn't replaced. GOLES is in touch with several of the families who had been displaced or the next generation. They have a right of return? Yes. I don't know what the actual legal course of action is.

What is the difference between a condo and a coop?

A condo already means you own the bricks and mortar in your apartment, while a coop means you one a share in cooperation and the amount of shares you have entitles you to occupy a certain amount of rooms.

Is it profitable for a developer to build a coop?

I don't think it is. It is more profitable to build a condo, because you can sell that condo at market rate to anybody.

These coops and the others were originally built as limited acuity coops. The Garment Workers Union put up the money for the bank loan which meant they were initially only available to people and families who were in the Garment workers Union and they could buy into the limited acuity Coop for, lets say, back in the day, $50,000. Being limited acuity, if tenants ever decide to sell their shares and move away they cannot sell their shares at market rate. There was a limit; a sort of percentage, like 5% per year as the value of the real estate itself went up. If you bought a share for $50,000 the most you could sell it for 10 years later might be $60,000. This also

encouraged the cooperative aspect, you're not in it as a personal investment; you are here to live here.

In 1997 these coops reconstituted themselves, meaning that they went back to that original limited acuity agreement and sort of refinanced their mortgages. The coops became open market, or market rate coops, that was an advantage of most of the people who lived here because they purchased them for so little money, and all of a sudden they could sell for what they are worth on the market. At that point, apartments went for between a $100,000 and $200,000, but since then some of the units have gone on the market as much as $800,000 to a million dollars depending on the floor, that's been up over the last 15 years. East River coop has been also has been reconstituted. A couple of coops in the city by the same architect between 23rd, in Chelsea, those are not reconstituted yet and they are thinking about it.

If everything is co-owned together, does it also mean that residents also own the air rights above the building collectively as well?

Yes, so there are air rights here that are available, and the debate even now, it is a internal debate among this coop about what they should do with these air rights. We also share our finances, like any coop, and selling air rights would mean money available for all sorts of capital improvement. But yes that money becomes available to every body. And the board would determine how to use it.

Let's considering the air rights, that there are a lot of air rights available for the SPURA site, but that developers are hesitating; I read that somewhere that during a community meeting they were hesitant to capitalize on these rights. Why is that?

It might not be worth it for the developers to build that high. They might build low and broad so they can supply a lot of numbers of units with a lower overhead and a easier type of construction, as suppose to building high…. They can also just built eight stories high straight across and call it a day, and you end up with a kind of building that you have on the corner of Houston and Bowery. Where the Whole Foods market is. They are taking all their FAR (Floor Area Ratio) by covering their entire site. It is just massive.

How are you involved in all this?

We can tell you a lot about the relationship in general with the neighborhood, how it has developed

with over the last couple of years, the last 5-years. First through the exhibition space downstairs, which was more active two years ago then it is now, which allowed us to engage the neighborhood from the street level. We have also been working on a publication that involves the building right across the street, the Abrahams Art Center. It was built on SPURA land in 1975, and that came to our attention because it was during the real estate boom in the 80's.

They have air rights, they were going to redevelop the building tear it down built something there, so they would gain some money from the sale of the real estate above them and they would build themselves a nicer facility down in the basement. That was just about to go through, they contacted a developer, there is even a model, and the real estate market crashed. Just in time. And now they know there is no hope, because the building is being considered for the landmark register. The Abrahams Center has been quite active in the community over the last 30 years, promoting architecture and art, and they have a program's in the local public schools. They are a part of the Henry street settlement. Settlement programs can apply for funding directly to the central government; Richard Nixon assigned their building grant for that building. We found that out from the architect who is still alive.

Is there a way legally to bring in air space into public ownership?

Well let's say these houses were owned by NICHA, a New York housing foundation, which is a public company, it is public housing, so those air rights between the buildings are owned by the public. In some cases in order to upgrade the housing project, or because of a shortage of cash, the air rights are being sold to bail out the building. I think they would sell it to the developers.

What is happening with the air rights in our building is actually quite interesting. There is no agreement as to how these could be utilized within this large lot, there are certainly FAR available, but there is no agreement of how to use them, or if they should be used. Coop board members who live in these apartments right here they don't want to sell rights; they don't want to ruin their view. That's part of the same concern that many other residents here have, reservations about SPURA. The Seward Park residents are going to advocate for a plan, which keeps the buildings low.

Air Rights as Material Sculpture

Air rights can be seen as a material that has a mass and volume and has traditional sculptural qualities – they are visible insofar as we can see through them or beyond them, but they're invisible insofar as they're not defined by any material boundaries. They become invisible when we define them materially, in the sense that we enclose them. How do you represent this invisible yet very material space? We can survey land that has not yet been built upon, and we can similarly survey and project air rights… and we can assess their value based on those surveys.

Language of displacement

They won't outright call it "eminent domain"… because that language seems to have disappeared along with "urban renewal" under neoliberal regimes of urban development. So then, it's "adverse dispos-session," which is essentially the same. They don't call it "adverse dispossession" anymore. They don't call it "slum clearing." It is on a case-by-case basis, just as the development itself comes under a case-by-case basis as all these things are treated by, or led by, or become tied up with business improvement districts, specific urban planning commissions, and all these small entities, which are tangentially related to the city and also purely private in these very tricky ways in which they kind of appear and disappear…

Making The Invisible Visible

Have you seen the Hugh Ferriss drawings? When zoning and air rights were introduced, Hugh Ferriss, who was an architectural draftsman… made these drawings based on… they're "massing" drawings basically. As you're looking at a site, all these laws are acting on the site – all the zoning regulations – and this is what the biggest, bulkiest building could look like on the site. And all those laws include things like, "at a certain height, it needs to be set back a certain…" So you have these very austere windowless drawings of buildings, halfway between metropolis-scapes and illustrations. They're not purposefully dystopian. They simply illustrate these things. They're very dystopian-looking. They are usually rendered in graphite or charcoal. Very dark, but very interesting…

The 120 Broadway [the 38 stories high Equitable Building, located in the Financial district of Lower Manhattan] is an important building in terms of air rights – how air rights and zoning law came about. It was the last full lot skyscraper built in New York. If everyone starts building buildings like this then no light or air will ever reach the street. This, access to light and air or something that we can see, is what we really consider public, in terms of what the relationship between something being visible and being public, and its legal representation, its legal confinement within and in relation to specific pieces of private property.

What I Want to See

I would hope that any construction that took place had a form of affordable housing that's much more aggressive than what's currently available. 50/50 is not what is normally done. 80/20 is what is normally done to entice developers to privately create affordable housing. And even then, it is affordable based on an area median income that is largely unattainable for the majority of the people in the Lower East Side… If I were to hope for anything I would hope that whatever was built or proposed would really exceed a proposal to building something… and actually say, "We need to look at area median income. We need to define it very locally." We can't include all five boroughs and Westchester and all these things that raise the area median income in New York to something that is quite high. We have to say "Okay, what's affordable for people?" People that have been displaced by the decades of gentrification in the Lower East Side and the East Village are never going to return. You're not going to lure them and bring them back. And bringing them back is not going to restore the romantic image of the neighborhood that we have… There are problems with wanting a very modernist solution. There are problems of wanting some kind of grassroots solution as well. And with a grassroots solution there's really not enough structural planning to accommodate large numbers of people. The last thing I would want to see there is a bunch of people coming in and saying, "We should turn this all into community gardens."

Preserving Empty & Open Space

Would you ever advocate maximizing the use of build-able space, or is it always just a matter of preserving that empty space for obvious reasons?

I don't know if the reasons for preserving it are so obvious. Well, one of the main reasons for preserving it is because the island is pretty

maxed out. So it's very unusual to find any kind of space for any kind of open or unbuilt space. If you were to preserve it, maybe you would just preserve it as it is and be like, "Yeah, this is the slum clearing that never added up to anything." That's a scar that the city could bear, and it could be productive.

But they wouldn't even do that with Ground Zero! What makes you think that they would do that with five empty lots?

No, of course! But, we're fantasizing here. I would also advocate maximizing it if it indeed guaranteed more inclusive socialized housing.

It would look awful though, don't you think?

I don't know. We live in this post Cold War legacy where we think modernist social housing projects look awful, but Karl Marx Allee in Berlin looks quite majestic when the buildings are in a very nice condition. It is often the case that the failure of modernist utopian architectural projects are blamed on buildings themselves as opposed to the structural shifts in capitalism that have taken place since the end of World War II.

Let's go back to something you'd said earlier. Why is open space important?

Open space is important because it has some kind of public function that exceeds the way that we think of the public as being bound by an administrative body. There is a possibility that we can think of "public" differently from being city-owned – and that has to do with open space. We increasingly find it in these types of neglected spaces or in spaces where levels of bureaucracy have become so convoluted that there appears to be no kind of administration looking after something. This is the case with the High Line before it became a very popular site.

So we're talking about "open" in a conceptual sense, not necessarily visually?

I would say both. Both visually, in as in "real space", and in terms of its administration and what kind of activities we find permissible or find inappropriate.

Artist + Urban Designer

Urban Renewal Case Study

It really was in some ways like a case study. What was fascinating about it was this moment of American urban history called urban renewal. Urban renewal… the way the story is told today among architects, urban planners and even communities, is that everyone agrees that this was a horrible thing that happened. But once you get a little bit past that basic generalized judgment, the reasons why people thought it was horrible, etc., differ today. So you'll have some people saying, "Well, what was horrible about urban renewal, is that it kicked out people", which definitely happened at SPURA, where many thousands of people were removed from houses that once stood on those vacant lots. On the other hand, you have people who are like, "Oh, urban renewal was really horrible because Le Corbusier had this horrible design ideology that was somehow exercised through this federal program." And I think what is totally fascinating in terms of how SPURA fits into this broader arc of urban renewal and its interpretation today is that it is a real story where the defeat of urban renewal – which is why nothing was built on these lots – was a victory for class and racism. So, even though today most people will celebrate the generalized defeat of urban renewal as a democratic victory, this actually is at least a really strong counter example to that, where urban renewal was stopped for the purpose of basically supporting a class segregated apartheid city.

Unrealized Plans

Something that I use a lot in my work is a history of unrealized plans, because I think in some ways you can tell a lot more about a place from the things that were proposed and unrealized than the things that were actually built. So for example, since 1967 the area in general and specifically those parking lots have been subject to at least five different major ideas for how it should be built, ranging from "It should be a giant shopping mall!" to "It should be all affordable or middle income housing", in this kind of mega-structural architectural concepts, to various mixes of that, to even small things… like when CBGB had to leave its location on the Bowery due to rent increases – that was actually talked about as a proposed use for the Essex Street Market for example. I could

probably dig up some documentation about different uses that were proposed for different sites and what killed it. Why it didn't happen.

SPURA Then & Now

It is a totally fascinating sequence of events over the last forty or fifty years there. There have been a lot of efforts recently that people are pissed off about – such as the affordable housing folks – but there has at least been a kind of consensus formed – whether it's through force or not is unclear – around a certain formula between market rate housing, affordable housing, and commercial. People seem really hopeful, but certainly people have been really hopeful in the past that something will happen. And then, it has fallen apart. It will be interesting to see how it unfolds, once again. A lot of the past plans went pretty far. Bloomberg is pretty far behind this one, but Koch had a plan with LeFrak that got far enough that there were many articles written about it in the New York Times. Still, developments stopped. And today, on the other side, you have the strongest advocates for affordable housing who have voted against this deal. It's still subject to some debate about whether that was just a vote of conscience in the sense that they knew it was going to pass and they weren't so upset about that but they still wanted to register their dissent, or whether there actually is remaining opposition from the left, but… you know… political will is a fragile thing… and it will be interesting to see what happens.

Last Line of Defense

Hanging out in St. Mary's towers, which are generally project/section 8 affordability programs, talking about those two buildings, particularly on the north side of Delancey – the blue building and the hotel – someone just looks at me saying, "Have you seen the death star? The death star is coming to annihilate us…" It sounds comical on one hand, but people are truly upset, feeling the same way the more affluent white people in the neighborhood did when they celebrated the defeat of urban renewal. The blue building and the hotel have now taken on this symbolic aspect for working class, low-income people of color in the neighborhood as being the last line of defense – in the same way people talk about public housing in Harlem being the last line of defense against the up scaling of the neighborhood.

Community Organizer

Relocation

Take Cooper Union as an example: I don't think it is a coincidence that along with this brand new, high-end architectural building, you have far more complaints about Cooper Union being a bad neighbor than you did in the old building, which they are also still occupying.

Another example, more concretely for SPURA, would be the Cooper urban renewal area, which is where Whole Foods is now. It is the same trajectory. It is a highly contested urban renewal area, though not as contested as SPURA, maybe because the ethnic boundaries are marked right there, on the site.

So, I think you have to very cautious about trying to move things. How one advocates for that in a public forum, about what might get lost in relocation, seems really difficult when everything seems so very much focused on numbers, ratios, and things like that… There are number and ratio-based arguments that would allow you to preserve the market and not loose any housing too. Our members are divided on this question, because of the housing and for the preservation of the market. People love the market and want to make sure it survives. Right now, though, it is really financially solvent.

The EDC

The real reason the city wants to do this is that they want to demolish those buildings and build 100% market or high-end luxury commercial on many of those sites.

Because the agency that is driving the project is the Economic Development Corporation (EDC), and their mission is revenue for the city. They are also the ideology-machine for the city. They push the neoliberal line. A project has to be self-financing or make money, as opposed to being subsidized. Their role as the developer for the city is to push public-private or private projects on public land, as opposed to NYC Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) or the Department of Parks, which have more deeply rooted social functions. So they, as an agency, are public but are ideologically aligned with the notion of 'public'. They are a semi-autonomous city agency that's not directly under council control. They're

technically a non-profit but they are also a city agency. For example, they can owe the city money… It is a strange setup.

Participatory Planning

The public visioning workshops were conceived with two purposes. One was to start having a less confrontational, or less of a "tribal" conversation about SPURA. Because that is how plans in the past have been derailed. Puerto Ricans versus the Jews versus the Chinese, versus the Italians. Less acrimony along those lines is really necessary to actually start to formulate demands around what should be built on the site. The workshop aims to break up people into small groups and then to collectively come up with their priorities for what should be built on the site through a dot voting system. People could prioritize, for example: "low-income housing" – ten dots, "park" – six dots. Then groups report back to the whole group and compile that into a report. And that report shows that there is consensus for the type of housing being developed.

We did something comparable though much more specific, called "community scenarios process". As the guidelines vote was approaching, we actually used a city planning tool that been developed for the Community Board and we reprogrammed it such that the developments on that site did not have to be self-financing. The EDC's line was that the project had to be self-financing, and we rejected that premise. We reprogrammed as such so that you could have a deficit and came up with an actual scenario of site development. In our scenario, 93% of the development was affordable in some way: 20% extremely low income, 13% very low income, 7% low income, 20% moderate income, 26% senior, 7% middle income, and then 7% market rate which is dramatically different from what the Community Board ultimately decided.

Public subsidy

There is a long history of buildings throughout this neighborhood and throughout NYC that are subsidized: public housing, Section 8, rent stabilization… this all is a form of subsidy. But also, if you look at recent development projects: Hunter's Point South in Queens received a $135 million subsidy. This was initially planned at 60% affordable, but what happened was groundbreaking: 75% or more affordable. So there is recent precedent for this. Very often, State subsidies do not benefit communities at all. Atlantic Yards received massive state subsidy through the Empire State Development Corporation.

So, subsidy is used on really bad projects as opposed to projects that could help people.

Why? Neoliberal ideology. State intervention is happening but it benefits the wealthiest as opposed to poor working people, because the wealthy create jobs.

Research & Demands

In the participatory workshops the role of pedagogy and education is essential to have the so-called experts meet real experts – the people who live here. This is fruitful because they have different perspectives. A classic example is Marci Raven. She found an ad in the New York Times from the late 1960s that the city was required to put in the paper, saying: "for all the following displaced families from urban renewal areas around the city, you can come collect your supplemental payments." This, in combination with the list she found, became really useful because now we are in the position of trying to get the city to enforce what we want, and to actually show the existence of this previous engagement of the city. It took Marci's research combined with people's demands to make that happen.

Continuous organizing

Once the RFP's (Requests For Proposals) are decided and get meted out to certain developers, we'll have to keep organizing at the SPURA site. There's a long history on this site. Even when buildings go up, the resistance continues. When the Seward Park Extension was built in the early 70s, it was racially segregated. Site tenants of color were not being allowed to return, and they were giving priority to non-site tenants who were white. So when those buildings were built, there were occupations and sit-ins of the renting office and the management office. And that is why they are integrated to this day. That and a lawsuit called Otero v. NYCHA [New York City Housing Authority]. So, the history of the site compels us to keep organizing through actual tenancy of the buildings.

The model

Some people had walked out the March 30th Community Board Three meeting because they felt excluded from influence on the urban design of the site. We need to have public workshops so that we can work on the urban design. The city did eventually have a sort-of open house event, which was mildly satisfactory. It wasn't really fully participatory, but at least

people could have a chance to talk with the city and communicate their own ideas.

Community benefits like prevailing wage, living wage, local hiring – this all needs to be figured out in the urban design phase. Because the next phase is environmental impact, when the official city planning process starts. The real action is not happening on the physical model. It is largely happening in the policy debate around urban design principles and behind the scenes conversations that are surely happening around how the project gets financed, how the housing numbers will change, and what gets to go where.

The urban design process we are going through right now will not show how the buildings look. If it gets down to the specificity of how the zoning happens, maybe. There's nothing aesthetic about the urban design phase. There's only building height, really more determined by the final zoning, and possibly bulk. It is unclear how the urban design principles, which are good, will affect development. They don't have the same weight as the EIS [Environmental Impact Statement]. They don't have the same legal weight as the ULURP [Uniform Land Use Procedure].

For example, they took the DOT [Department of Transportation] sites totally out of the equation during the urban design process. The city wants a loose philosophy to guide the development, and that is what the model is providing.

Needs

We want a lot of things. Site tenants' right to return is very important. We are talking about 1,852 families who were displaced. It's a very large community of people who are site tenants or are related to them. So site tenants should have the right to return and for themselves and their children.

But the housing mix we could not abide, so we have and we will continue to meet with elected officials to change the fundamental assumption that the project receives no subsidy, because if that assumption is changed, then we are talking about dramatically different possibilities for the housing.

We're in an implementation phase for issues like right to return. This means that we are trying to get the city to meet the site tenants and their children and to commit to sending out a letter saying that says "you have the right to return."

It is in the guidelines so it should be done.

Open Space Trade Of Emptiness

Low-income housing is first priority. We are now at the point of the *program*. The program has been the debate for forty-three years. The empty lots are proof of this debate. The emptiness that exists in the Seward Park Urban Renewal Area is because the city committed a social crime in the 1960s. The fact that it is empty is a reminder of that crime – people pass it everyday. That life will be coming to these blocks is a good thing. It's just a question about whether new buildings will it seal the fate of the neighborhood as an almost completely gentrified neighborhood or not. Can it contribute to the survival of the poor working class of the Lower East Side? That is the fundamental question.

Low income?

With the current guidelines, it is not really possible to accommodate all the families that were displaced that wish to return and also make room for the inclusion of new immigrants. We are only talking about 200 low-income family units tops and 100 more low-income senior units under the current guidelines.

If the city, the federal and maybe the state, government were to establish a subsidy stream, developers would take the subsidy offsetting their costs for building more low-income units. And that should preferably not happen by providing a zoning bonus to developers, because that would transfer more FAR to more luxury units. Cash subsidy would ensure a portion of the development would be for low and moderate-income families.

There is also the relevant question about *keeping* it low-income. The residents of one of the co-ops in the Seward Park area had voted to move away from their fixed equity status and go into a much more privatized market. This was a great tragedy. People paid 500 down for those apartments in the 50s, and now they are being sold for twenty-four hundred thousand, maybe 1.2 million dollars. Socialist unions built them, there were murals of Eugene Debs and Abraham Lincoln in the lobbies, and it's really sad that people who are moving in now are yuppies. It's not serving the purpose of what those buildings were built for.

Social Crime

If SPURA had been redevelopment at a different time,

a different ideology – that would probably have public housing – would have ruled. A great victory is that consciousness around the site is changing. There is recognition on the part of the people that are thinking and planning together about this site that it constitutes a social crime that needs to be readdressed. This is the result of 40 years of organizing. Virtually in every news article about this site there is recognition that it is really a tragedy, that it is really a crime that 1,800 families were displaced. It got to the point where we were being accused of being only history oriented and not focused on the present debates. So, yeah, there has been that consciousness shift, which has really limited the ability of historical standpoints arguing that the site should only be a commercial space.

Neighborhood Resident

Nothing

For the number of years I have lived here, I walked through this bleak, really unattractive neighborhood with many empty lots. And I wonder. It is so strange in New York City and especially in the Manhattan landscape to see so much emptiness. Certainly over the course of the 90s and the past decade, there have been a lot of developments and a lot of gentrification in Manhattan. It is just unusual for such huge parcel of land to be left undeveloped on such a small island. But I never really used to think any further than that. I assumed these lots had been always empty, and that they were always used for parking, and that's that.

Then one day I was talking to an elderly resident of my coop that talked about what used to exist on these sites, and I was shocked to find out that once there was a pretty thriving and active neighborhood on the site. It struck me that vibrancy once existed there and now it was just nothingness.

That is when I really started to peel into the history of SPURA. I found out that back in the sixties, through the political process of urban planning and urban renewal, most of my neighborhood had been erased. They erased hundreds of tenements and shops and places to build coops along Grand Street, the low-income houses that exist on the part of the SPURA site.

Because of political issues, many of those lots marked for the wrecking ball were raised but never rebuilt, and that's where we are today with SPURA. They didn't have the money or the political will to figure out what to do with it. They had the political will to erase those sites but not to plan what to do with those sites.

We were talking about more then 40 years these lots have been empty, and that is not doing anybody any good in this neighborhood.

I don't want to glamorize what those sites and building were like. But the idea that there was a neighborhood that existed that was literally wiped off the map; it is shocking because we all like to think that when time passes we evolve, but if there is a lesson about that SPURA site it is that that what happened here was de-evolution you know, over 50 years. This was once a poor and scrappy neighborhood but was actually a community of people who liked living there. And a community of places to go, people to see, has devolved to a point that now there is nothing but rubble, bud wire fences garbage brick walls, nothingness, bleakness. That motivated me to do something actually to build a community there again.

Something for everyone

There is a lot of controversy and you never get people to agree on what to do with the site and that's why it has been empty for the last 40 years. In the years passed it was either "my way or the highway" kind of approach, which alienated large segments of the neighborhood, and other times a lot of racism was injected into the discussion.

And what I recognize from these community boards' new guidelines is that there was a little bit of something for everyone. If you are from the coops from Grand street, the projects elsewhere, low income, middle income, market rate, it was a good healthy mixture of everything. I think sometimes that are compromises that everyone feels a little bit slighted, but you know, that's a compromise!

I never felt happy with the guidelines that were passed. They know that there is a political reality to be taken into account, and I don't think they've taken that into account. It has been my impression that they are seemed more interested in keeping those lots empty for another decade and so they can get exactly what they want. And I think that's exactly in service to their own supporters and certainly not doing any service to the local

community. That's why I differ with their approach. I respect their opinion but they seemed to be much less willing to compromise and more interested in just holding out for a better deal that may never come. And if that better deal never comes the problem with the political reality is that this neighborhood will have to endure new decades of empty lots. I think 40-somewhat-years is enough of emptiness.

LES of 2018

Perhaps the definition of community or who constitutes the community should be elaborated, or who benefits from the development of this space. And perhaps that is the source of a lot of the conflict – the constitution of the community. Whoever is the true constituency for this site definitely changes from one perspective to another.

I think the city of New York did a really horrible disservice to the people who were displaced. I should note that may of those misplaced residents did get other housing but there are some who did not, and I am fully into support to give those residents who exist and who are still interested in moving back there. The disagreement comes with this question: is this community fixed in time, you know, is this the lower east side of the 1960's, or is this the lower east side of 2011? NY is a completely dynamic city unlike a lot of European cities, which tend to stay more fixed in time.

Define Communities

It is a totally diverse community of low income, middle income, middle upper income… white, Latino, African, think this is really a rich and diverse neighborhood. Therefore, the guidelines of Community Board 3 Task completely reflects that diversity in the fact that they are units for low income residents, units for middle income, units that are market rate, there is commercial and retail. Now you know, if there is enough low income is there enough market rate? That's when the fights begin. And again I think there is a political and a financial reality that has to be looked at, and as long as each of those elements has been acknowledged, and there hasn't been a all or nothing being approach, that really is the most realistic way to reflect what is a diverse community.

50-50 compromises

It is not fair to have a 100% market housing, and it is not fair to have a 100% low-income housing,

it is important to convince the community of that. If you want to see these lots empty for the next 40 years, you stay firm. But if you want to break through that impasse you have to give and accept a little on either end. 50-50 is a good compromise.
Sustainable development

We want to evolve from the 19th and early 20th century model of tenements housing to the most up to date 21st century model, sustainable also… there was in fact a whole financial element to the cities' pursuit to developing these sites. The projects had somehow to pay for it self and therefore the city was willing to sell those parcels of land at a great discount and they were using the market rate units to help subsidize and pay for the affordable units and so that the entire project would be sustainable.

I talked about how emptiness disconnects us from other parts of the community. I'd love it to be a community of mixed income residents. I'd love to see a community of young families. The reason why I want to compromise, because people like the diversity of this neighborhood, and I myself would not want a community of yuppies or only elderly residents. I want a mix. I want this new development to enhance diversity. I also want a more vibrant street scene, and that is one of the most exciting parts of SPURA. Instead of having these tall towers in the park I would like lower buildings with retail spaces on the bottom floor. That would create a more dynamic street scene. A lot of walking and interactive experience. That is also what you see in the old images. That is also what Jane Jacobs talks about in her books. And I think with these new developments, it is going there.

Density is good

The tragedy of the emptiness is its bleakness, its nothingness. Some people like it empty, it is open and airy. It is just garbage, danger. It is discouraging for the neighborhood. I am concerned about height, but I am thrilled that shops will appear on the ground, and that there will be destinations here again. Not the same as it used to be, but a modern life, a quality of life, that brings people here. I understand some of the negatives, but I am more positive about the direction the developments seem to be heading.

Homage to Displaced

Creating a new community there. There is no community in emptiness. That community is not going to return. That's doesn't mean that we should not try to get

tenements to this place, that we should not create affordable units, but the past is gone, you are not going to recapture what was once there, and nor should you. That time is gone, and we have to move beyond that.

What I want is modern

I am also excited about the potential of new architecture. There is always the concern about brick, boxy towers, and that is also my concern, but I hope to bring to the table some new exciting design, something that is really dynamic looking. They used the word gateway building; it is one of the first impressions you'd get. I live high up, on the 17th floor. Impressive architecture, green rooftops, dynamic street scene, cafes, retail spaces.

I like to see life from my window. I saw those empty lots as a complete absence of life and activity, and that stimulated me to engage with the future of this site. I want activity on the streets once again. A mix and diversity of architecture.

Urban Planner

There are two questions. One is: how much density is appropriate in such a part of the city. And that was decided years ago. We're not going to change that. We are not going to put more square footage, more apartments more people, or less then what was already there.

Was that already determined 30, 40 years ago? Before or after the demolition?

After. After the demolition of the previous blocks that were here.

So the initial volumes were based on the volumes that were taken away?

No, the ones before. They were of the turn of century, so that was before there was any law. You know, tenements laws, health and safety laws. The NY zoning was started in 1960 and radically changed in 1961. The idea of density for this area was established in the late 60s, early 70s when all these towers were being built. There is an overall idea of how much density and what kind of land use each different neighborhood of the city can handle; each has a range going from a very low-density

neighborhood to very highest, which is Lower Manhattan.

Midtown

Then there is Midtown and there is everything in between, depending where you are, so it is always stepping up and stepping down. And it depends on the transportation, the infra structure how much you can handle, you can accommodate a certain amount of people living in a certain area based on the infrastructure.

This density is expressed in FAR or Floor Area Ratio, so it is expressed as a multiple of the amount of height. So this is a FAR 6 – what that means is the square footage is the land times 6. You can build 6 times the square footage. So a 6-story building takes the whole lot. And a 12-story building takes half of the lot. You can do whatever you want. Sometimes it is a matter of open space and height. Creating open space on the ground and then pushing that density up. They have a lot of green. Very tall but a lot of green.

The more recent variations on this is more of sculpting, rather then just being about tall versus short, it is about a sort of variations and a more urban design.

Air Rights

So if the air rights are fixed in this area and agreed upon a long time ago is it then the intention, or the idea of the city to use the full advantage of the rights that are there?

Yes. The air rights are defined to the value. Air rights have a value, a monetary value and if you don't use them all you don't get all the benefits. No developer would do less than the maximum they could do. When you are an architect and you are working for the developer, the developer is trying pushing you to get every inch; you don't want to have any air left.

Zoning

Does the air rights zoning have consequences for example for these two SPURA lots?

No. The typical NY model is that the streets break, cut, your right to air. These rights go with your property. Whether you just own this one little house here, that's where I can use my air rights. So you can only use your air rights within your line, you

can't cross the street. And the only exceptions are for some very special public purpose.

If a whole new site is being created, as many blocks all at once, and you kind of think of it as a complete design. Like a campus. Then you can write a new law about that whole zone. There are special zoning districts where this is done, where you are start to change density from one place to another to make it more interesting, make a nice design, a complete composition.

The Site

This site is a little bit in between, because it should work as a complete composition but at the same time these are going to be separate projects by separate developers and separate pieces of land.

So the models at the presentations were representing all the heights?

Yes the models were about showing a way to design these buildings and showing that you can do it differently.

Objection

So these people cannot object anymore? The ones here, when you decide to build higher up?
We were asked to put the recording device off….

Urban Anthropologist

Language

We were doing research in Harlem in the 1980s. We went to the Harlem State Office building from which you can see down from Harlem all the way down to Central Park, and we said to person there working – this was 1983 – "How are you going to gentrify Harlem?" So he said: "well, it's going to be a difficult project…. The first beach head is going to be 112th street, so we are going to go to 112th street and secure that beach head, and then from 112th street we will go to 116th street". And you could see from the window the whole vision on Manhattan, and he said "well, 116th street, that's a mother fucker of a street, so what we are going to have to do is to create a second beach head and then draw the wagons around, and come in from the outside, from the East, from the West, and from the

South, and then from 116th, we go to 125th street, right?" So it is total military language, and this is a particularly American way of thinking about gentrification. It is also the whole language of the frontier, which of course is a military notion, and it is exactly that language that has come back. The same thing happens in Europe, though it happens in a different way. The language in Europe is 'regeneration'. What regenerates? Forest, if you cut them down. It is a 'natural term'. It is an attempt to hide the language of gentrification, the class content, the class shift in the use of urban space under this supposedly natural language, as if saying: it is a purely natural process,… regeneration. So it doesn't have the viciousness of the military language, but it does have an equally nasty effect. It just hides what is really going on.

The zoning question

It is very odd for Europeans to come to the United States, and look at a city and say, so what does the city plan look like? What city plan? I mean there is no such thing as a city plan. At best you could say there is a city plan produced in about 1967, which got some headlines in the New York Times and was put on the shelves and left, and then you got another city plan at a regional scale, produced by a regional planning authority, maybe thirty odd years later. There is nothing to like a London plan, or an Oslo plan, and zoning becomes the de-facto mechanism, so it is through zoning that the cities class- geography is constructed.

Zoning happens at different scales. Literally it can be building-by-building, and it can be multiple forms of use that are in a single building, so you can have a five-story building that is zoned as a combination of residential and commercial. There is zoning block-by-block but also neighborhood-by-neighborhood. And this is the genius of the Bloomberg administration. Bloomberg has been far more effective in gentrifying New York than Giuliani ever was, who brought the cops out to get rid of homeless people to literally clean up the city. I mean that is what zero-tolerance can be as well about and this is how Giuliani understood the street. Bloomberg is the consumer corporate billionaire who isn't going to get his hands dirty. Instead what he has done is to re-zone. The latest figure I saw was about a 104 neighborhoods in the city. So if you look at places like the Lower East Side and if you look at Houston street, you will see areas where previously the zoning was such that you were allowed to five, six maybe seven story largely residential buildings. What they have done is re-

zone it completely so you have got a higher density, and various zones for higher densities, so you're going to have 15-20 story condominiums that are built. You see that along Houston Street now and that is all Bloomberg.

What happened prior to Bloomberg was that the re-zoning was often done haphazardly. So if the developer wanted to build a building that was much higher than the zoning allowed, the developer would just open negotiations with the city and say: well listen, we'll fix up the parking across the street… And the city would say, yeah but you would have to put parking within the building, so, ok we'll build an underground parking, subway is nearby, why don't you finance the refurbishment of the subway, and before you know it you've got a 40 or 50 story building. Like the Zeckendorf Towers on Union Square, that's how that was organized in the late eighties. There is also Park Towers, up to Columbus Avenue, very close to the museum, again it was just 'zoning variances', what they called a variance from what establishes its use. What Bloomberg has done is to render that system systematic, so they have gone through a lot of neighborhoods with an eye on gentrifying the city, on literally changing the class geography of the city, and re-zone the 104 neighborhoods in all five boroughs with that larger vision. There is a pure agenda behind it, and precisely because of this it is put rather through in technical terms as 'zoning legislation', and 'zoning regulation', so it didn't hit the headlines. It is a class division of the city.

Going up: Unfix Zoning

So intensifying the zones means that more volumes can be built on that zone, and the only way to make that happen, is to go up. What they do is, they produce a ratio, a Square Foot Ratio of the amount of square footage in the building that is supposedly useable space against the lot size. Classically, in the LES you would have R6-R7. R is residential, 6-7 is a ration of six to seven times the square footage of the lot you are allowed to have, and what that really translates into is a six, maybe seven-story building. So the whole point of re-zoning is, that indeed it is fixed, until it is re-zoned. And the re-zoning is not a huge political process, it is a bureaucratic process. And the re-zoning might move it to R15: you can then build a 12, 13, maybe 15 story condominium. And if you've got R15 you might be able to build higher than 15 stories: if you've got a lot that size, and you build a building that is only taking up 3/4 of the actual lot space, you can go higher.

Community boards: Canalize opposition

The developer comes in and says, “OK, it is R6 but to really be able to build we need to be able to make a profit. To break even we will need to build a 11, 12 story building… so, what can we do?” The community boards were established in the early 1970s as a way of trying to canalize the opposition towards developments taking place. What the city decided to do was on the one hand they were giving an organized voice to this community opposition. In fact what it did of course was to bureaucratize it. I think in 1974 the community board was instigated. Now, almost 40 years on, you can see that the purpose of the community boards is effectively to give some kind of ratification, some sort of camouflage for the kinds of decisions that the city and developers are going to make anyway. There are not a lot of cases now where a community board stands up against a development plan and wins. I don’t know the specifics of the SPURA situation but I would be extremely surprised if the community board either has the serious interest into creating something radically different from what the city wants to do, and is successful in putting it through.

One of the great cases recently is what happened in Harlem. Columbia University wanted to expand, north from 120th street. And over the 125th. It is very clear that Columbia’s plan ultimately it to connect both campuses. They effectively own most of the property except for the Projects north of about the 123rd street. It is all about doing that. The community board of course had to say No, but the community board was relatively weak, and was fighting against what a lot of communities in Harlem were against as well, but the power of the city was going to blackmail them into accepting one way or another with the developers in mind, in this case the university and the university is now one of the major corporate real estate developers in the country.

Cooper Union with such a history of enlightened bourgeois thinking and approach to education going back to the 1850s, now very suddenly becomes this very ruthless developer. You would expect it from Columbia and NYU; Cooper Union was a surprise. This is a privatization of education of totally public institutions that have to compete when there is no social provision, that’s what is facing them.

Artists are the casualties of gentrification

I haven’t looked at the re-zoning maps of the LES but there are significant areas that have been

re-zoned to produce condos. The LES has been not just tamed but rendered, put on the plate of real estate developers. And one the rather nasty things that happen in that process is that artists then are blamed for this process. The important question is: what you see and what you don't see, in terms of how a neighborhood changes. You see artists moving in, you see white families moving in into Latino neighborhoods, you see middle and middle upper class kids moving in, you see poor people moving out and just not coming back. So you see people moving. You don't see the capital moving. You don't see when somebody owns a building goes and tries to get a loan to redo the roof or the electrical system, or the plumbing system, and the bank says no. You don't see the non-movement of capital. You don't see when somebody sells a building for ten times what it was bought for, ten or twenty years ago. Those figures are not visible in the streets in the way the changing and change of people in the street are visible. Landlords had lots of abandoned properties that they had trouble renting and one of the things they did was renting very cheaply to artists. And sure, the artists moved in. But they are not the cause of gentrification. The causes lie much more deeply in the geographies of investment and disinvestment, and the logics of the market there.

It happened very clearly that landlords would give artists relatively cheap rents, especially for properties that were zoned commercial. So in 1987 there was an estimate of 70-80 galleries… how did that happen? Well, in about 1982 when the city was coming out of the recession, landlords started to provide relatively cheap space for artists. Nobody else was renting at that time. Relatively cheap space. And because commercial rent control doesn't exist in the city, after five years (typically they gave them a 5-year lease) by 1987, when the LES was really taking off as the entertainment district, the landlords turned to the artists and said hey you are in an up and coming neighborhood, your rent is going up by a 300%. So you can see that some artists were part of the shock troops in a social sense but they were playing a much larger economic game were they were the victims. To go back in the military language again, they were the soldiers, somehow.

Thinking beyond gentrification

You always have to ask the question: why now, why there? On the city side, what was going on? Well, by the early 1970s, liberal urban policy is effectively in shambles, the cutback in building and in public housing is declining, and this is

happening within ten years of that site being cleared. In 1970 the Nixon administration 'canned' liberal urban policy. That was the beginning. Reagan really only focused on the closedown of liberal urban policy and what Reagan didn't do, Clinton finished. So with that happening within the bureaucracy, there was no sense of what they wanted to do with the space. Various plans came up, but where were they going to get the money for it? They had the money if they would have changed priority, but they couldn't get developers to do it, so the interregnum with that space and others like that had everything to do with the failure of liberal urban policy and the necessity of waiting – from the point of view of the developers – for the moment that the gentrification process picked up enough in that place or around that place to make it profitable development. So of course when you put it that way, the needs of the people in the LES have just vanished from the equation. Their needs were never on the front of the agenda.

The lie of gentrification

So far I haven't seen a genuinely mixed gentrified neighborhood, where incoming wealthy people get to live with the poor people who used to live there, where unemployed and homeless people get housing next-door to wealthy people… it just doesn't happen, so the whole ideology of social mix and housing is built on a lie. And the lie is that people want to create social mix in housing. People don't want to create social mix in housing. I could tell you right now how to create that. I'll tell you exactly what we'd so; the Upper East is I guess 90% white, the average income of over 200.000, it is extra-ordinary. It is very unmixed, and very wealthy. I would take 1/3 of the population of Harlem, and move them to the Upper East Side, and take a 1/3 of the population of the Upper East Side and move them into Harlem. If you want to create mixed neighborhoods, that's the way to do it. Move rich people into Harlem, but move the people from Harlem who have been displaced into the Upper East Side. Right? Lets do that. When people talk about mixed housing nobody ever talks about moving black families from Harlem into the Upper East Side. So what does that tell us about the argument of the social mix? What it tells you, is that one of the central rationale behind the argument for social mix is actually gentrification. It is to move wealthy people into poor neighborhoods, and take over the neighborhoods, and move poor people out.

The debate in Britain is even more disgusting. One of the headlines I saw, and this was very

much parroting the present government's line on housing: Do poor people have a right to live in rich neighborhoods? And the premise of that is that somehow these neighborhoods had always been rich, and who knows, how the poor people had got there…? The other side is, that if that question gets to be asked: Do rich people have the right to move into poor peoples' neighborhoods? You got to ask that question too. If you want to be thoroughly neo-liberal about it, and see both sides.

Air rights: creating a commodity out of nothing

There was some discussion of air rights as early as the 1920s, and they were really mobilized seriously in the 1960s. It is fantastic: creating a commodity out of nothing. Marx was brilliant on this, in the definition of the commodity he says, it is not a thing, it is not an object like a table or a chair… it is something that combines a use value and an exchange value. And it is not just Marx: Adam Smith, the classical economist knew something that neo-classical economist today can't understand, and it was this combination of use value and exchange value. So that fact that you are talking about empty space in the sense of empty of anything except of the polluted air of the city doesn't make it value-less… it is exactly the opposite, and it can be capitalized.

The most interesting though is not so much the fact that you can buy and sell air rights vertically. It is the horizontal: how far do air rights transfer? In the 80s they started 80-20 buildings. You have a piece of property that was demolished by the city or taken over by the city because of lack of payment of property taxes… they would contract a developer to build housing on it. The developer would want private housing, the city would want public housing and for a while they would build: the norm was 80-20-buildings: 80% private market, 20% publicly subsidized. Then the discussion started, where this 20% public housing needed to be in the neighborhood. So sometimes they made a deal that could be half a mile away or a mile way. So the law opened up, and now you have a situation where the 80-20 deal could actually be cross-borough. Talking about a means of gentrification… there might be a universal law in the books for New York City that says: air rights can only travel so many meters or yards, it may be by case by case negotiation. I would be very surprised if it wasn't.

The question of social housing

The question of social housing becomes tricky as well.

If you look at all of the cases where the agreement is an x percent of social housing in a development you look at, you should ask: what is social housing? The way the city does it, is that you have a figure of 50.000 of medium income for the neighborhood or for the city. If you look at any of those project and you say: 20% is low income housing actually 20% of it has some public subsidies and in almost of these cases, a large percentage of that 20% is right at the top of the higher arch, so if you got a 1000 housing units, 20% would be 200 'low-income', you could actually find that a 160 were for the group that is only just within the income range of the publicly subsidized. So that means you could have households of over 100.000 dollars a year whose housing counts as publicly subsidized.

And that is where the perversity of the language comes in again, because everybody says we have to support the middle class. In the US there are three classes: homeless, millionaires and middle class. And that is of course a wiping out of any contemporary political memory of a working class. The LES is gone; there is nothing to stop the development. The proximity to midtown and to downtown is such that nothing will stop the rents from going up with all the other rents. And that's the key. Before Bloomberg they were stuck with the housing infrastructure as it was but Bloomberg just totally changed that game. So there is nothing to stop the LES becoming much denser again but wealthy. But people say: he makes the city much better… well there are two sides to that: you have to look back historically. Things like the cycling lanes, making it a more cycle friendly city, a lot of that has been pushed by Critical Mass, so he is responding to that. The same is true of the waterfront development that Bloomberg is pioneering. Those plans were in the works from at least the 1980s. What Bloomberg is very smart at is to stop environmentalism from being a revolutionary demand. Today, environmentalism is massive big business and Bloomberg knows it and he creates an environmental city. What is gentrification all about? It is about pulling capital down from the circulation of capital globally, pulling it down, into New York. So you do that by capital investment for offices, you got to create a place where people from the offices would want to live so you create an environmentally friendly city for that middle upper class working group; you are catering to tourism.

Revanchsim and neoliberalism

Giuliani's zero tolerance became an example for other cities, it went viral globally in the 1990s,

and it became the ultimate global rationale for revanchism against your own citizens. What we are seeing now is that revanchism is becoming deeply rooted; it is becoming rather an assumption than an exception. And it is becoming thoroughly globalized.

But actually I am slightly optimistic. A couple of years I've been going back to Habermas: he talks about modernity, how modernity is dominant but dead. And I think that is where neo-liberalism is now. I mean, the left lost. Massive, world historical defeat, and the neo liberalists did take over, and they did have new ideas. Even if the new ideas were from the 18th century, they looked new. They really did have the political and intellectual momentum. Neo liberalism is dominant and so far there is no chance – but it is dead in the water, there is no vision anymore, no new ideas coming out and at best it is a fill-in proposition for them now.

The anti-globalization movement actually deserves more credit than they've got. They said: another world is possible and that was very important in retrospect. The economic crisis in Asia in the 1990s sprung loose people like Sachs and Stiglitz, the economist who came totally on board, and they said: wait a minute, this is not doing anything. So the Asian economic crisis revolts in Latin America, in the streets, those revolts were vital. The Iraq war is even incompetent by standard of the neo-liberal governments themselves. It was meant to make Iraq safer for American global investment…. they can't even organize a war, and then the economic crisis of 2007 onwards,… so that project is dead. The really scary part is that the left has not in anyway organized something to do in its place.

Urban Historian

Unfinished Story

It is really important that you know that we present the story of that site as an unfinished story, as a contested history, and as part of a larger story of urban renewal and its implications or its cost here, in the neighborhood.

It is particular interesting to me as an urban historian and urbanist. The kind of narrative about urban renewal here in NY is – in broad strokes – is Robert Moses and his opposite, people like Jane

Jacobs. It is a victory when we were able to stop the Moses machine. In SPURA you have a really interesting example of 'Yes that was effective'. They stopped the 'tower in the park' public housing that is being built. But then the result is actually nothing gets built for the next 40 years. So it complicates that story. It is a story about those folks, who organize on a grass roots level to prevent things that they didn't want to see happen with that site. And the result nobody really being able to agree is nothing. It is nothing in what is essentially a series of empty parking lots. For the last 40 years. Not to mention all the people who were displaced and who never found housing in something that might have been built instead of the old tenements housing that got demolished.

In terms of the museum, we think it is important, not to take a particular stand on any issue. … It is an unfinished story and now we can really ask our visitors at this point – of course that is before the most recent kind of developments going on with the site, all those plans – asking our visitors eventually what they would want to have built there. Involving them, they become part of that conversation. They probably heard the story, and we really try not to be very specific about all the different visions for that site, but to just convene the idea that this story is about an urban renewal site, a massive one, and one of many here in the neighborhood. A site that was in many ways envisioned as a way of modernizing what were in some cases forgotten left over neighborhoods.

Gentrification, Nuanced

The idea, in regard to gentrification, is to unpack what that word means particularly on the ground here, in the Lower East Side. It's meaning is not a black and white issue. Yes, gentrification brings displacement, particularly for newer and lower income immigrants. This has been a traditionally iconic immigrant neighborhood, a kind of gateway, or how that seems to remain, and one of the few neighborhoods that maintains that identity where everywhere else it can't stay the same. But you also talk about the folks who started working here at this museum in the late 1980s and finding hyperemic needles in the stairwell, and homeless people sleeping in the stairwell of what is now a museum building. So it is not a black and white issue and we don't want to present it as such and we think that issue is a nuanced sophisticated one that has many layers. It is a layered issue certainly and we want to have that conversation with our visitors.

The Story of Essex Street Market

At the museum we are particular worried about the current market building. So many of us shop there, we have our lunch there. It is tied in quite a lot of the stories we tell, not only during the walking tours but in the building itself as well. The plan is that they want to replace that building on the South side of Delancey Street with a new one. But this building tells a particular story that is really important to the neighborhood and the understanding of its history, particularly in the 1930s period and beyond. The design of those buildings – with its windows – are a great example of social engineering. It tells an important story about the history of the neighborhood in an architectural way: of course they wanted to get the pushcarts market out of the street, for a variety of different reasons. That was the 1930s vision for modernizing. This street would look otherwise full of pushcarts, it looked like an old world backwards neighborhood then, and architecturally the market building helps to tell that story. But in a functional way, that market, just like the pushcarts that preceded them, have given generations of entrepreneurs, whether they were immigrants or not, a place to begin what eventually would have become a successful business. Folks are able to rent a stall at the market with little capital, they don't pay thousands of dollars a month in this neighborhood for a storefront now, right? That is a terrific thing.

Shop Keepers Story

There was one shopkeeper there who had a business in the late 1930. He ran what essentially was a wholesalers jobbing house. He sold all kinds of different things, general merchandise, and he had a really interesting auction house component, he would auction off lots of goods. We have a whole history with him. He ended up in the market, because in addition to having a store he had two lines of pushcarts out in front, and from his perspective – in addition to the auctioning component, you could hear that all the way down the block – from his perspective it was really those stands that brought costumers into his stores. So when the city essentially abolished the pushcarts in the late 1930s he closed his shop there and moved to the market. So there were these types of individuals still there in the late 1980s. He sold housewares and furniture and these kinds of things from a stall at the market for nearly 50 years, from the late 1930 until 1980s.

He was there that long, but when city law found him in the late 1980s he was running a botanica. He was a child from Rumanian Jewish immigrants; he was born across the street right here. He inherited the store 97 Orchard, from someone he worked for as a kid or a teenager, and then ends up in the market.

And you learn why and how he got into that business. He sold things like mops, he was talking about how somebody buys a mop. It doesn't mean this person comes back the next week to buy another, they come back when there mop is worn out, like in 6 months from now, a year from now. But he would see these customers return weekly, or maybe even more frequently, to buy religious items as well, particularly candles. Being the kind of entrepreneur and business man he is, he said to the woman selling these items: that's the kind of business I want to be in, when you are ready to sell your business, I want to take that over. So there he was by the late 1989s speaking Spanish, running a botanica, and with a Porto Rican girlfriend after his wife died. So that is so interesting. It is a place where these different sorts of cultures have intersected in very interesting ways.

Coops; Children of Immigrants

The buildings we are talking about stand there as material residue of these histories, but those buildings on the SPURA site are not there, and so it is kind of like…. it feels pretty violent almost. Different people compare it to a war zone; it is the residue of the battle against the poor, as how it is often narrated. It is interesting to think about it as a battle against the poor. My understanding of one of those primary roadblocks to having anything built there has long been the resistance on the part of a lot of the folks who live in the cooperative houses along Grand Street, to additional low income housing in the 60s and even in the 70s, when it al ready a sort of transpiring. What is interesting is that the folks who lived in those cooperatives apartments are the children of immigrants who lived in tenements, maybe the same ones, I mean that is not a uncommon kind of a thing, but is an interesting dynamic, I think…

Urban Continuity

What do you want to see there? To ask the question you ask your visitors; what do you want to see there?

I don't know… I mean other then a broader generalization that it should be mixed use. And it should

be mixed income. Probably on a personal level, that is probably who I would feel.

Architecturally, they could do something totally mad.

There is an argument to be made for low scale developments; it is within the historic character of the neighborhood, but that is debatable too I guess, because right now the coops are a part of the historical landscape of the neighborhood. Part of me says, well what is interesting about this neighborhood and so many like it is that it is never finished and it is always in the process of becoming something else and so, that should be a question of what that is. That should be open to debate.

Glossary of names and terms: A-Z

Air Rights are legal entitlements that generally refer to the maximum amount of floor area permissible for development on a zoning lot. When the actual built floor area is less than the maximum permitted floor area, the difference is called "unused development rights." Unused development rights are often referred to as air rights.

(Michael) Bloomberg is an American businessman, politician and philanthropist. Since 2002, he has been the Mayor of New York City. He is also the 13th-richest person in the United States and the founder and eighty-eight percent owner of Bloomberg L.P., a financial news and information services media company. A lifelong Democrat, Bloomberg switched his registration in 2001 and ran for mayor as a Republican, winning the election that year and a second term in 2005. Bloomberg left the Republican Party over policy and philosophical disagreements with national party leadership in 2007. In the fall of 2008, Bloomberg successfully campaigned for an amendment to New York City's term-limits law, in order to allow him to run for a third term in 2009 as an independent candidate on the Republican ballot line, a term he won on November 3, 2009.

CBGB (Country, BlueGrass & Blues) was a music club at 315 Bowery at Bleecker Street in the borough of Manhattan in New York City. Founded by Hilly Kristal in 1973, it was originally intended to feature its namesake musical styles, but eventually became a forum for American punk and New Wave bands like the Ramones, Patti Smith Group, Mink Deville, Blondie, The Cramps, The Shirts and Talking Heads. In later years, it would mainly become known for hardcore punk. The storefront and large space next door to the club served as the "CBGB Record Canteen" (record shop and cafe) for many years. Eventually, in the late eighties, the record store was closed and replaced with a second performance space and

art gallery named "CB's 313 Gallery". The club closed in October 2006. Patti Smith performed the final concert.

CB3

is the Community Board No.3 of Manhattan, New York City. The Community Boards of New York City are the appointed advisory groups from various districts throughout each of the Five Boroughs of New York City. Community Boards have an important advisory role in dealing with land use and zoning matters, identifying community needs as part of the City's budget process, and working with government agencies to improve the local delivery of services.

A Condo

or condominium is a form of housing tenure and other real property wherein a specified section of real estate (usually of an apartment house) is individually owned while the use of and access to a building's common facilities – such as hallways, heating system, elevators, and exterior areas – is executed under legal rights both associated with the individual ownership and controlled by the association of owners that jointly represent ownership of the whole building.

A Co-op

is a housing cooperative and a legal entity, usually a cooperation that owns real estate, consisting of one or more residential buildings. Each shareholder in the legal entity is granted the right to occupy one housing unit, sometimes subject to an occupancy agreement that is similar to a lease. The term is also used to describe a non-share, capital co-op model in which fee-paying members obtain the right to occupy a bedroom and share the communal resources of a house that is owned by a cooperative organization.

The Double-Cross-Subsidy plan

also known as a "double-cross-subsidy plan" by community activists, would theoretically pay for the construction of low-income housing, funded by the sale of city-owned property to luxury real estate developers.

EIS

or Environmental Impact Statement, under United States environmental law, is a document required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) for certain actions "significantly affecting the quality of the human environment". An EIS is a tool for decision-making. It describes the positive and negative environmental effects of a proposed action, and it usually also lists one or more alternatives.

FAR

or Floor Area Ratio is the principal bulk regulation controlling the size of buildings. FAR is the ratio of the total floor area of a building to the area of its zoning lot. Each zoning district has an FAR which, when multiplied by the lot area of the zoning lot, produces the maximum amount of floor area allowable on that lot. For example, on a 10,000 square foot zoning lot in a district with a maximum FAR of 1.0, the floor area on the zoning lot cannot exceed 10,000 square feet.

FEMA

is the Federal Emergency Management Agency, an agency of the United States Department of Homeland Security that was first implemented in 1979. The primary purpose of FEMA is to coordinate a response to disasters in the United States that overwhelm the resources of local and state authorities.

Hugh Ferriss (1889 – 1962)

was an American delineator (someone who creates perspective drawings of buildings) and architect. According to some, Ferriss never designed a single noteworthy building, but after his death a colleague said he

"influenced my generation of architects" more than any other man. Ferriss also influenced popular culture, for example Gotham City (the setting for the movie *Batman*).

GOLES

(Good Old Lower East Side) is a neighborhood housing and preservation organization dedicated to tenants' rights, homelessness prevention, economic development, and community revitalization. It has served the Lower East Side of Manhattan since 1977.

Jane Jacobs

was an American-Canadian writer and activist with primary interest in communities, urban planning and decay. She is best known for her book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961), a powerful critique of the urban renewal policies of the 1950s in the United States, which has been credited with reaching beyond planning issues to influence the spirit of the times. She is equally well known for organizing grass-roots efforts to block urban-renewal projects that would have destroyed local neighborhoods. She was instrumental in the eventual cancellation of the Lower Manhattan Expressway. Named after her, *Jane's Walks* is a series of neighborhood walking tours. The walks offer a more personal take on the local culture, the social history and the planning issues faced by the residents.

The Kerner Commission Report

was produced by the Kerner Commission in 1968. This commission, formally known as the National Advisory Commission On Civil Disorders, was convened by President Lyndon B. Johnson in the wake of wide spread urban rioting in the late 1960s in order to examine the cause of the urban riots and to develop strategies to control or prevent future unrest.

The Koch-LeFrak Way

The administration of NYC mayor Edward Koch (1978-1989) contracted with developer Samuel LeFrak to develop SPURA, but massive and divided opposition caused it to be withdrawn. The plan proposed one condominium building to be sold at market rates, the profits of which would help underwrite the cost of the two other buildings – these would contain a total of 800 rental apartments. If approved by the City Planning Commission and the Board of Estimate, the plan would have represented the most significant use yet by the city of a financing arrangement called a cross-subsidy.

Robert Moses

was the "master builder" of mid-20th century New York City, Long Island, Rockland County and Westchester County. As the shaper of a modern city, he is one of the most polarizing figures in the history of urban planning in the United States. He changed shorelines, built bridges, tunnels and roadways, and transformed neighborhoods forever. His decisions favoring highways over public transit helped create the modern suburbs of Long Island and influenced a generation of engineers, architects and urban planners, who spread his philosophies across the nation. He was never elected to public office, and his works remain extremely controversial. His supporters believe he made the city viable for the 21st century by building an infra-structure that most people wanted and that has endured. His critics claim that he preferred automobiles to people, that he displaced hundreds of thousands of residents in New York City, destroyed traditional neighborhoods by building expressways through them, and precipitated the decline of public transport through disinvestment and neglect.

The National Coalition for the Homeless

is a national network of people who are currently experiencing or who have experienced homelessness (such as activists and advocates, community-based and faith-based service providers). Their mission is to end homelessness.

Organizing for Occupation

(O4O) is a collective of NYC Housing activists from the legal, arts, homeless, and grassroots organizing communities who are using the direct occupation of vacant spaces to create housing and stop evictions.

Jeffrey Sachs

is an economist and director of The Earth Institute, whose mission is to address the complex issues facing the planet and its inhabitants, with a particular focus on sustainable development and the needs of the world's poor. Sachs became known for his role as an adviser to Eastern European and developing country governments in the implementation of so-called economic shock therapy during the transition from communism to a market system, or during periods of economic crisis. Some of his recommendations have been considered controversial. Subsequently, he has been known for his work on the challenges of economic development, environmental sustainability, poverty alle-viation, debt cancellation and globalization.

Single Room Occupancy

(SRO) is a multiple-tenant building that houses one or two people in individual rooms (sometimes two rooms, or two rooms with a bathroom or half bathroom), or to the single room dwelling itself. SRO tenants typically share bathrooms and/or kitchens, while some SRO rooms may include kitchenettes, bathrooms, or half-baths.

Spatial Deconcentration

is based on a military strategy for establishing control over urban areas. This term was first outlined in the Kerner Commission Report in 1968. The theory of spatial deconcentration is based on a military strategy for establishing control over urban areas.

SPURA

(Seward Park Urban Renewal Area) covers five vacant plots of land owned by New York City on Manhattan's Lower East Side, near Delancey and Grand Street, and was acquired as part of a 1965 urban renewal plan. SPURA remains the largest tract of undeveloped city-owned land in Manhattan south of 96th Street. Deciding what the "appropriate redevelopment" of SPURA should be has stalled the process and kept it undeveloped for over 40 years.

Joseph Stiglitz

is an economist and a professor at Columbia University. He was the recipient of the Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences in 2001 and former Senior Vice President and Chief Economist of the World Bank. He is known for his critical view of the management of globalization free-market economists (whom he calls "free market fundamentalists") and some international institutions like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. He is one of the most frequently cited economists in the world.

ULURP

or Uniform Land Use Review Procedure established a standardized procedure whereby applications affecting the land use of the city would be publicly reviewed. The city charter also established mandated time frames within which application review must take place. Key participants in the ULURP process are now the Department of City Planning (DCP) and the City Planning Commission (CPC), Community Boards, the Borough Presidents, the Borough Boards, the City Council and the Mayor.

The United Nations Human Settlements Programme

(UN-HABITAT) is the UN agency for human settlements, established in 1978. It is mandated by the United Nations General to promote socially and environmentally sustainable towns and cities with the goal of providing adequate shelter for all.

Rodrick Wallace

research scientist and writer of *A Plague on Your Houses: How New York Was Burned Down and National Public Health Crumbed* (1999) and many papers adapting quantitative methods from population, community and ecosystem ecology to the theoretical and empirical analysis of problems of public health and public order.

Zoning shapes the city

Zoning determines the size and use of buildings, where they are located and, in large measure, the densities of the city's diverse neighborhoods. Along with the city's power to budget, tax, and condemn property, zoning is a key tool for carrying out planning policy. New York City has been a pioneer in the field of zoning policy since it enacted the nation's first comprehensive Zoning Resolution in 1916.

Colophon

Elements of composition [As above, so below]

A project for Living As Form, organized by Creative Time, from September 24-October 16, 2011 in and around the historic Essex Street Market, New York.

Bik Van der Pol produced a site-specific public text piece on the empty parking lots adjacent to the Essex Street Market, in conjunction with daily walking tours that are in collaboration with NY citizens and open to visitors. The phrase, *As Above, So Below*, reads as an abstraction from the ground while being legible from above. It points towards the contentious (re)valuation of space in the neighborhood, verticality and the concept of air rights, which apply to owning the space above plots of land and buildings. While looking into the void, one realizes that this empty space, now parking lots, also carries the imagination of the future, of what will be. The view of the empty sky at some point will crystallize and capitalize. In collaboration with Google Earth the text piece will be stored in Google's archive and thus immediately becomes part of history while this empty site will continue to develop in time.

The texts in this publication provide an insight in the background research, while the program of walking tours by a range of specialists and active citizens add even more voices to those already existing.

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For more information, see www.bikvanderpol.net and www.creativetime.org