

Acknowledgements

The urban environment which shapes our everyday lives is a hotly contested terrain. In *Urban Space/The City as Place* guest curator, Molly Hankwitz, brings to light many of the debates and discussions that arise as the city is subjected to renewed economic and social tensions.

Ms. Hankwitz is a critic and public artist whose publications have appeared in ARTFORUM and INLAND Architect. She studied architecture at Yale University and is a recent graduate of the Whitney Museum's Independent Study Program.

We are grateful to Ms. Hankwitz for her thorough research and thoughtful selection of the films and videotapes included in *Urban Space*. Her essay contained in this publication further illuminates the debates on the urban environment. For her generous contribution to the design of this publication we are especially grateful.

Our thanks also go to the artists and activists who have produced the films and videotapes in this program. Their dedicated effort to improve the city and document the changing urban milieu serves us all. Finally, we are grateful to the New York State Council on the Arts and the Media Arts Development Fund of the National Alliance of Media Arts Centers, whose generous support makes our film and video programming possible.

Celeste Dado
Acting Executive Director

Micki McGee
Media Arts Curator

Funders

Artists Space programs are made possible by: The National Endowment for the Arts, a federal agency, New York State Council on the Arts, and New York City Department of Cultural Affairs; AT & T Foundation, Inc., The David Bermant Foundation: Color, Light, Motion, The Bohen Foundation, The Cowles Charitable Trust, Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, Foundation for Contemporary Performance Arts, Inc., Horace W. Goldsmith Foundation, The Greenwall Foundation, Jerome Foundation, The Dorothea L. Leonhardt Foundation, Inc., The Joe and Emily Lowe Foundation, Inc., The Menemsha Fund, Joyce Mertz-Gilmore Foundation, Betty Parsons Foundation, The Reed Foundation, Inc., The Rockefeller Foundation, The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc.; American Express Company, The Chase Manhattan Bank, N.A., Consolidated Edison Company of New York, Inc., R. H. Macy and Company, Inc., Morgan Guaranty Trust Company of New York, Philip Morris Companies Inc., and U.S. Trust Company of New York, as well as Artwatch, Galleries in Support of Artists Space, Members and numerous Friends.

Artists Space is a member of the National Association of Artists Organizations (NAAO), the National Alliance of Media Arts Centers (NAMAC), and Media Alliance.

Artists Space
223 West Broadway
New York NY 10013
212 226-3970

Urban Space The City as Place

1991

September 26 – November 9

Film and Video

Program

organized by Molly Hankwitz

**Artists
Space**

223 West Broadway New York NY 10013

212 226-3970

Urban Space/The City As Place

Organized by Molly Hankwitz

September 26–November 9, 1991

The video program screens continuously during gallery hours, Tuesday–Saturday, 11 am–6 pm.

► PROGRAM 1 (Running time: 72 minutes)

METROPOLITAN AVENUE by Christine Noschese (49 minutes, 1985) documents a community of women who organize and respond to cutbacks and racial tension that threaten their community.

THIS IS A HISTORY OF NEW YORK (The Golden Dark Age of Reason) by Jem Cohen (23 minutes, 1988) suggests the arcane beauty of the city through architectural details and the movements of people through the metropolis.

► PROGRAM 2 (Running Time: 57 minutes)

AMERICAN DREAMING by Michael Penland (57 minutes, 1990) reports on the devastating effects of the Atlantic City casino industry on the surrounding neighborhoods.

► PROGRAM 3 (Running Time: 59 minutes)

Excerpts from activist videotapes by RENEW, a Williamsburg planning and activist group, by Peter Gillespie, Hank Lindhardt, and Jon Rubin (35 minutes, 1991) document the community-based planning group's strategies for coping with commercial and private threats to their neighborhood.

THE SQUATTER BLUES, by Marcia Wilson (4 minutes, 1990) uses an 8mm camcorder to produce an intimate document of the demise of a squat on 8th Street in New York City and suggests the activist potential of video intervention.

PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENTS by the C-Hundred Film Corporation (5 minutes, 1990) are innovative broadcast interventions advocating on behalf of improved urban housing and planning.

THE MARCH OF TIME by Jason Simon (15 minutes, 1985) reflects on the urban environment in a minimalist contemplation of Times Square on the eve of the area's proposed redevelopment.

► PROGRAM 4 (Running Time: 55 minutes)

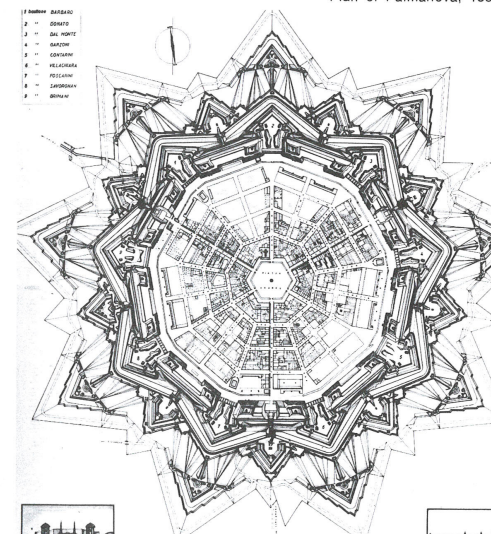
THE SURVIVAL OF A SMALL CITY by Nancy Salzer and Pablo Frasconi (55 minutes, 1987) examines a once thriving New England town before and after "revitalization."

Artists Space Video Programs are available on VHS for home viewing. Inquire at the front desk or call 212-226-3970 to reserve tapes.

Film and Video

SCHEDULE	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
11:00 - 12:00	Program 1	Program 4	Program 3	Program 2	Program 4
12:00 - 1:00		Program 1	Program 2	Program 3	Program 2
1:00 - 2:00	Tapes on Request		Program 1	Program 4	Program 3
2:00 - 3:00	Program 4	Tapes on Request		Program 1	Program 2
3:00 - 4:00	Program 2	Program 4	Tapes on Request		Program 1
4:00 - 5:00	Program 3	Program 2	Program 4	Tapes on Request	Tapes on Request
5:00 - 6:00	Tapes on Request	Program 3	Program 2	Program 3	

Plan of Palmanova, 1851.



Artists
Space

The City as Place

Yet, individually, of course, the city provides freedom of hierarchization, the pleasure of unrestricted and restricted mobility and the privacy of personal experience apart from the social or political.

—An Essay by Molly Hankwitz

Human Scale

my curatorial emphasis on as much *de-glamorization* as possible, hence the focus on activism alongside of more traditional forms of documentary or non-narrative film.

The visibility of conservative social and economic shifts, lies, not only in the numbers and the cutbacks and the deliberate corrupt redirection of funds into Republican-owned "upscale" building programs,³ but in the environment and its myriad immediate effects upon our social, practical and physical selves. In New York, we live, and I am referring to low-renters—working class people, artists and the poor, *the public sector*—amid rickety, ill-maintained infrastructures, poor transportation systems and roads, depleted public school systems and hospitals, suffering neighborhoods, dilapidated recreational facilities and underfinanced municipal services, not to mention, at times, vermin and unclear water. Simultaneously, we are slapped in the face by a continuing poverty of values emanating from the organs of the privileged and the rich, which treat others and the space of others as a place for bulldozing, dumping, toxic waste, advertising jargon, temporary nouveau-riche restaurants, and worst, speculative re-development schemes, or 'mega-projects'⁴ which are more than exclusionary (they are known to cause displacement and homelessness), and often wind up, years later, as architectural and financial disasters in and of themselves.

The making of these bourgeois utopias is insured by dominant ideological concerns held by private development in a capital-rapid "free-enterprise" market, wherein a city, like New York, becomes the object of hegemonizing capital from the outside, from distant suburban investors, multi-nationals, and fast-buck franchise businesses. The impact of these 'mega-projects' (see Michael Penland's *AMERICAN DREAMING*, 1989 on Atlantic City and the casino industry) characteristic of post-Reagan economic history, cannot be underestimated. Not only do they reproduce the meta-material relationships of dominant classes, but they accomplish this by promoting romantic fictions of American and Europeanized imperialism. Constructed narratives of 'nature', 'frontier-pioneer' and 'colonial ownership' are among some of the devices used in advertising and real estate literature.⁵ Conceive of the ideological nexus which is required for Donald Trump to replicate the Taj Mahal as a gambling casino in Atlantic City!

Within the composition of East Coast post-industrial cities, mixed-use 'mega-projects' for homogeneous populations of predominantly white 'upscale' professionals reflect the current resurgence of classism, racism, and economic superiority, while mirroring little of American traditions of internationalism, multi-culturalism and democratic egalitarianism. Moreover, as city governments mesh with private developers to support their creaky budgets and create financial dependency, this re-development trend seems a more than visible plague. It seems to be one more permanent piece in an indelible picture-puzzle of neo-conservative dominance. Can a city like New York survive as the factory of politics which it is, or will the working class, the artists, elderly, people of color and the poor, be pushed further to the borders, into sub-cities, satellite projects, and ghettos for the disenfranchised?

Conceive of the ideological nexus which is required for Donald Trump to replicate the Taj Mahal as a gambling casino in Atlantic City!

To inhabit urban space, that is, to use liberally the means of production and to engage, to one's advantage, in social resources, institutions, and an array of options, is, of course, the *pleasure* of urban living. It is a pleasure to be close to the source, to be able to mobilize thought and action, to organize oneself around and in relation to different cultures. The express transformation of the city fabric to high-cost financial space and luxury housing is *threatening to all small-scale urban life*. Zoning conditions change and inhibit the growth of affordable low-rent districts. (New York's much contested 42nd Street Redevel-

ment Project is a good example of this). By the same token, planning concepts rarely take into account notions of ownership which include territorialization, or the long-term occupancy of land or buildings or the familial ties and inhabitations which bind many ethnic neighborhoods in support of themselves. The issue of squatting (see Marcia Wilson's *THE SQUATTER BLUES*, 1990), for example, begins to address an alternative politics of ownership. The question can certainly be asked, "What right does a city have to force squatters out?"

And as long as public forums on design and urban planning exclude the poor, the working class, people of color and artists' communities, or refute and limit our authority to shape the way we live, we will be at home with our enemy.

So far, my discussion of large-scale development has been formulated around issues of histories, ideology and the market-place of late capitalism as it influences, one's perception of New York through various systems of representation. I arrive, thus, at *human scale* and the condition of neighborhoods in a healthy urban environment. How do they function? Who do they benefit? Why do they survive or fail? If one asked most travelers what they like about cities, they will say "all the different neighborhoods." Yet neighborhoods function, well or poorly, for many reasons and to be sure this *organic* aspect of a living neighborhood is different from a developer's generalization. One can conceive of an entire city as a large neighborhood, a parent community, which provides resources from revenues, administration and general welfare to citizens or one can think of a neighborhood as belonging to the whole city, such as Lincoln Center on Manhattan's Upper West Side, which as a compound of art institutions and playhouses, forms a locus for people with similar interests and tastes. Then, of course, there are street neighborhoods, minuscule in scale as a unit of urban space, which are bounded or form boundaries, and have a characteristic attitude or identity. The well-being of these neighborhoods is indicated by their ability to act collectively, whether for reasons of self-government, security, maintenance or celebration. (see documentation of RENEW, a Williamsburg, Brooklyn community planning and activist collective). These units in turn make up the elements of a district, which functions to collectivize the needs and values of smaller areas.⁶ (The Lower East Side in Manhattan has been trying to form itself as a district for some time). This type of articulation is necessary for neighborhoods to maintain identity within city bureaucracies, where rights for tenants and landlords alike are exercised and protected legally. Yet, individually, of course, the city provides freedom of hierarchization, the pleasure of unrestricted and restricted mobility and the privacy of personal experience apart from the social or political. Obviously, these definitions ascribed to neighborhoods and individual cultural difference are in contrast to development trends which tend to sentimentalize and de-politicize representation. In Chicago, for example, there are many Old World ethnic communities, where various cultures thrive mostly as a result of an earlier massive immigration to the Midwest. Yet, the late 80's and 90's development trend has been to rename Chicago's neighborhoods in "retro" or "ethnized" facsimiles and sell them piecemeal in a large-scale gentrification effort. Colorfully designed banners of new entitlement spell out this speculative shift in demographics and production.

Human Scale

Having made it thus far, I return to my desire to foreground this film and video exhibition as a program about representation and the city. Can a synthesis between architecture and activism be made where the preservation and comprehension of cultural difference is at stake? Can we declare a viable *de-glamorized* social space through film and videoworks which will not fall into the traps of being a transcendental or heroic avant-garde? Can we undermine the fashionable notion that social spaces are the outcome of abstract design, rather than built upon tangible means of labor or a more marxian historical materialism? Without de-

volving into popular romances with 'natural materials' or symbolic utopian courtyards, there are community-based planning strategies to be put into effect, development projects to be protested and halted, environmental hazards to be contested and rent strikes to be won. And as long as public forums on design and urban planning exclude the poor, the working class, people of color and artists' communities, or refute and limit our authority to shape the way we live, we will be at home with our enemy. Hence, the film and videoworks I have chosen seem to best represent *public urban movement*.

Although I was not able, given the limits of the exhibition, to include all the material I reviewed, I hope that my work inspires others towards a deep investment in their endeavors, so that ultimately we can share the wealth of our immediate environments in New York and elsewhere and crush the tyranny of domination which permeates this American decade. I would have liked to include the efforts of the Harlem EV Collective, Shelterforce in Hoboken, Jon Alpert's *HOUSING IN AMERICA*, and his recent tape, *THIRD AVENUE*, as well as more material from the C-Hundred Film Corporation Archives, but these remain to be seen. Knowing that I fall short of this mapping, I give what I have offered to be taken up by critical dialogue and the disbursement of more useful ideas.

Copyright © 1991
Footnotes

- 1 This idea is an encapsulation of Neil Smith's theory, "Toward a Theory of Uneven Development: The Dialectic of Geographical Differentiation and Equalization" in *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital and the Production of Space* (Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell, 1990-91) Chapter 4.
- 2 Rosalyn Deutsche, "Alternative Space" in *If You Lived Here: The City in Art, Theory, and Social Activism*, ed. by Brian Wallis (New York: DIA Foundation; Seattle: Bay Press, 1991), pp. 45-46.
- 3 Martha Rosler, "Fragments of a Metropolis: Viewpoint," ed. Wallis, *ibid.*, pp. 29-36.
- 4 'Mega-projects' is a term in common usage to describe fortress-like, large-scale mixed-use projects which are being built by developers: The 42nd Street Redevelopment Project, NY; 'Battery Park City, NY,' 'South Street Seaport, NY,' 'Quincy Market, Boston MA,' 'Peachtree Plaza, Atlanta GA,' The Harlem River Project, NY.—to name a few.
- 5 Smith, *ibid.*, pp. 4-16, 22-31.
- 6 Jane Jacobs, "The Uses of Neighborhoods," *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Vintage Books, 1961), pp. 116-126.
- 7 This term is my own, meant to induce an idea about space wherein the aim—that one strives for—is free from the strictures of stereotype, prejudice, fashion, appearance, and status and is instead about a positive materialism and culture à la Raymond Williams—a space rid of ideology?—and *re-subjectivization* as opposed to *de-subjectivization*. See also Rosler, p. 21.

Bibliography

- De La Croix, Horst, ed. *George R. Collins. Military Considerations in City Planning: Fortifications*. New York: George Braziller, 1972. pp. 21-56.
- Harvey, David. *The Condition of Post-Modernity: An Enquiry into The Origins of Cultural Change*. Cambridge MA: Basil Blackwell, 1990. Chapters 1-5.
- Jacobs, Jane. *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. New York: Vintage Books, 1961.
- MacCannell, Dean. *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class*. New York: Schocken, 1976-89.
- Rosenberg, Tanya, trans. Mayuan Delanoe. *Spaces by Artists/Places des Artistes*. (3e Retrospective Parallélogramme 3. 1978-79.) Toronto: ANNAL, 1979. Ch. 2,3.
- Schneider, Cynthia and Brian Wallis, ed. *Global Television*. New York: Wedge Press, 1988. "Video and the Counterculture" by Patricia Mellencamp, pp. 199-225.
- Smith, Neil. *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital, and the Production of Space*. Cambridge MA: Basil Blackwell, 1990. Chapters 1-5.
- Wallis, Brian, ed. *If You Lived Here: The City in Art, Theory, and Social Activism*. (A Project by Martha Rosler) New York: DIA Art Foundation, #6. Seattle: Bay Press, 1991. pp. 15-71, 129-134, 144-145.
- Wright, Frank Lloyd. *The Living City*. New York: New American Library, 1958. Part One: pp. 19-27. Part 3: pp. 81-116.

• My thanks to Micki McGee and the staff of Artists Space, the artists whose work appears in the show, Norine at Canterbury Press in Berkeley CA, Inigo Mangano-Ovalle, John Campbell, for his patience and love, and to my friends and family.

Film and Video Program

Artists Space
223 West Broadway
New York NY 10013
212 226-3970