

BROWN UNIVERSITY URBAN STUDIES PROGRAM 2007 NEWSLETTER



Note from the Editor

Senior co-leaders of the DUG, Amy Barad and Robert Corey-Boulet, have noted that the Urban Studies Program is gaining interest, and it not surprising. The interdisciplinary nature of the concentration trains students to make unique connections.

This newsletter contains articles that focus mainly on the built environment of the city. Sharing their perceptions--from personal experience to

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analytical observations-- the contributors show that there are many ways to experience city issues.

Jessica and Jesse both focus on contemporary issues here in Providence. Together the articles illuminate the layered nature of a city and the inter connectedness of its challenges.

Continuing the topic of city development, Itiah and John offer criticism of schemes in other American cities. Itiah's examination of a historical example, the urban renewal in New York City, reminds us that fundamental concerns, like housing, require comprehensive planning and often meet unanticipated obstacles.

John corroborates this viewpoint with a current example, rooted in the devastation of Hurricane Katrina. This premise illuminates how cities are susceptible to natural disasters, while John presents the unique situation in Pass Christian, Mississippi.

James Njoo is the urban studies studio professor in the Paris half of the *The Shape of Two Cities: New York and Paris*, the only Brown-approved abroad program for urban studies concentrators. He traces the history of Chinatown in Paris and suggests that we can learn from its organic growth.

Jack Walsh leaves us with his impressions of the Arusha, Tanzania and the cultural differences he observed while volunteering there.

Enjoy! Caitlin Boyle

DUG Update

The Urban Studies Departmental Undergraduate Group is winding down a busy and successful year, capped by an interdisciplinary conference held March 9 at the Watson Institute for International Studies titled "Cities of the Developing World." The conference - which was sponsored by the Harriet David Goldberg '56 Endowment, Spatial Structures in the Social Sciences and the Department of Economics - featured renowned scholars and authors from across the country.

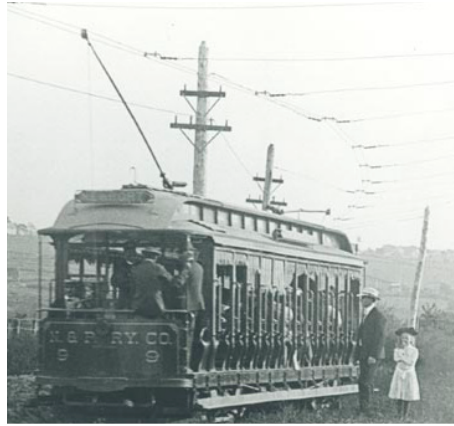
The programming was broken down into three panels: health and health care, crime and housing. The health panelists addressed topics including the delivery of care for tuberculosis in urban Peru, the potential for an avian flu pandemic and the role of public and private health care institutions in urban China. The crime panel featured research on Mexico City and international incarceration trends. On the housing panel, researchers spoke about housing circumstances in locales ranging from urban China to Latin America.

Setha Low, a professor of environmental psychology, anthropology and women's studies and the author of three books, delivered a keynote speech on gated communities titled "Fear, Privatization and the State: Gated Communities in the United States, Latin America and China." Her engaging presentation and the ensuing question-and-answer

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Public Transportation in Rhode Island - Paolo Ikezoe '07

My thesis is on public transportation in Rhode Island: past, present and future. In the first chapter I outline the history of mass transit in Rhode Island and try to highlight some of the technological innovations that have been attempted in the past. Then, in my second chapter I present a best-practices report that examines transit systems across the country and worldwide. It specifically addresses how they are attempting to improve service. Finally, I offer some suggestions for the RIPTA (Rhode Island Public Transit Authority) system and how it might improve its service and better serve the population.



Photograph credit

Above: <http://www.trolley museum.org/collection/newengland/9.html>

Below: <http://www.ccri.edu/currents/05-dec/index.shtml>

New Edge Cities - Carrie Nielson '07

In 1991, Washington Post journalist Joel Garreau published his epic work entitled *Edge City: Life on the New Frontier*. The book informed America about the latest type of urban development occurring on the urban fringe. These burgeoning areas, often places that were rural crossroads only a few decades ago, consist of massive office buildings and retail centers oriented about the automobile. Square footage was measured in the millions, and there were few homes in their immediate vicinities. Indeed, these areas formed a type of new suburb, where white-collar workers would commute from their suburban residences to work, completely bypassing the traditional urban core. Garreau qualified his analysis of the edge city by noting that this form of development was only in its infancy.

He could only guess what would happen to the edge city in the decade to follow. Using Garreau's definition of the edge city as a theoretical framework, my thesis examines three large-scale communities in California, Nevada, and Colorado, all of which meet or approximate Garreau's five-fold definition of the edge city. The twist is that each of these communities—Coyote Valley in San Jose, CA, Summerlin in Las Vegas, NV, and Stapleton in Denver, CO—is being master-planned either in the private sector or through a private-public partnership. To varying extents, these communities have also integrated some tenets of the smart growth movement into their master plans: mixed-use development, higher-density and affordable housing, and transit-oriented development, for example. In my thesis,

continued from page 1...

session gave urban studies concentrators the opportunity to speak with a notable scholar they first encountered when taking US 21: "The City".

The conference was a remarkable success, and it capped off a great year for the DUG. Thank you to all urban studies students and faculty who offered their support, and a special thank you to everyone else who participated in the conference either as a panelist or moderator.

Sincerely,

Amy Barad '07
Robbie Corey-Boulet '07
DUG Co-Directors

I will investigate these case studies as new forms of the edge city, as places that are built with some level of private-public interaction and with a comprehensive vision of what a progressively-planned community should look like.

Hurray For UTRA Funding! Mia Scharphie '07

Hurray for UTRA funding! I spent this past summer in Providence pursuing my urban studies interests out of the pressure of the semester timeline. I received an undergraduate teaching and research award (UTRA) that allowed me to work with Professor Patrick Malone on updating a course that I later helped him teach-Green Cites, a course on the history of designed landscapes in America.

Green Cities had not been taught in eight years and the syllabus was outdated. Readings and coverage were strong early in the semester, but were deficient of new literature, especially that dealing with the relation of the environmental justice movement to urban green space. I had much freedom and agency with regard to changes in the course, and I was able to focus on developing

the elements of the course that I was the most passionate about: namely, the stories of grassroots green space movements from communities of color and low-income communities, as well modern attempts at creating sustainable urban green space.

Preparation for the structure of the class was only a part of my summer learning. I accompanied Professor Malone to the historic industrial town of Lowell, MA, where he has been involved in historic preservation, and to a town in Pennsylvania that we photographed for the class. As we traveled through old coal country, and towns that have changed profoundly as their economic context has changed, I was enlightened by the perspective of an industrial archaeologist. We stopped in a town called Centralia which had been condemned due to

an underground mine fire which has been burning for thirty years. As the trails of smoke rose up from the deserted land, I realized that this field is just one example of the connection between land and resources, and the way that humans interpret, use and change them.

The other unintended benefit of this UTRA came from its continuation in the fall when I worked as a teaching assistant in the Green Cites class. Nothing I did during the summer could have prepared me for the wonderful mix of students who took the class and the synergistic effect of their differing backgrounds and interests crossing, meeting mixing. Although I had read (and even chosen) many of the sources and activities the summer previously, class discussions opened up whole new ways of thinking for me.

Overall, this UTRA was a perfect balance of independent learning, initiative and guidance. It added to my knowledge base, helped me evaluate the built environments around me with more fluency and gave me hands-on experience with the practice of constructing interdisciplinary curriculum.

RAB Grant - Caitlin Boyle '07

Thank you to the committee that awarded me a Research at Brown (RAB) grant to continue research for a conference this spring. Jonathan Villines '05 and I have been invited to present our project *Front de Seine: Integrating the Planned and Unplanned Uses*

of Urban Space at the Environmental Design Research Association's 38th annual conference, which will be held in Sacramento, California. EDRA is an international organization of professionals, researchers and educators that has pioneered its field for almost forty years.



Photograph by Richard Benjamin. <http://www.providenceri.com/richardbenjamin/>

Re-thinking the Urban Waterfont - Jessica Kondrick '07

The city of Providence is a work in progress. Currently developers are performing radical plastic surgery around the city's heart, most notably shifting the I-95 away from downtown and beginning construction on several new high rise condominiums. Hoping to lure Boston commuters, most attention is being paid towards Waterplace Park and Westminster Street. However, Providence planners and developers are beginning to shift their attention towards the Allens Avenue waterfront and asking what should be built. The RI Economic Policy Council calls this site "arguably the most valuable piece of real estate in the Northeast."

This site's value resides in both its position (bordering both downtown and harborfront) and the property's size. Its huge land tracts, previously used as industrial manufacturing sites, allow developers to "dream big" and plan large-scale projects unrestricted by tight CBD squeezes downtown. Visions have ranged from Buddy Cianci's high rise condo development, to Sasaki's public park and transit system for the waterfront.

Most recently, Patrick Conley has proposed to build "Providence Piers," a mixed-use development along the waterfront. Infamous for buying and selling tax liens of absentee landlords, Conley has acquired a sizeable portion of Allens Avenue which he will turn into hotel, residential, and commercial units. A Providence native and former history professor at Providence College, Conley feels that his high-end development will naturally benefit the surrounding community. Without consulting local residents or

business owners, Conley is pushing forward his proposed \$300 million development along Allens Avenue.

"Providence must replace its industrial and erogenous zones close to the downtown with a multi-use waterfront zone..."
Patrick Conley

After studying all these plans to develop the waterfront, several questions arise: What should be built? Who should decide what gets built? And most interestingly, who should benefit from the development?

In a Public Policy seminar last fall, "Urban Redevelopment and the Providence Plan," my group project revolved around these questions. We collaborated with the RI Economic Policy Council to determine *who* should be in charge of determining the highest and best use for the Allens Avenue site.

After personal interviews with Patrick Conley and several local businesses and community agencies, we developed recommendations that would bridge the communication gap between a developer and the surrounding community. Ultimately, the developer needs to reach out to the greater community as well as its individual residents. When developers, like Conley, exclude the community from the planning process, residents naturally felt excluded, and therefore at odds with, development.

Addressing the gap between developer and business-owners, our group proposed three recommendations. First, developers may benefit from creating an independent authority or advisory body whose opinions could weigh

into the plan for redevelopment. Second, the developer should conduct a comprehensive economic analysis of the area to ensure his plan is both economically feasible and solely beneficial to the surrounding community. Last, developers should clearly define the development areas to assuage the fears of neighboring residents and business-owners. Regarding Allens Avenue, South Side community organizations who are preoccupied with the possibility of displacement by either gentrification or eminent domain, would be comforted to know their property would only benefit from the new development.

Although most Allens Avenue spectators agree that *something* must be done about the state of the waterfront, it is unclear *what* should be built there and for *whom* it should be built. In an ideal planning process, developers, business-owners, and residents would all collaborate to design a waterfront benefiting everyone equally. In practice, however, the development process is imperfect. In the end, it is the developers, not the community, who have the last word in what should be built on the waterfront.

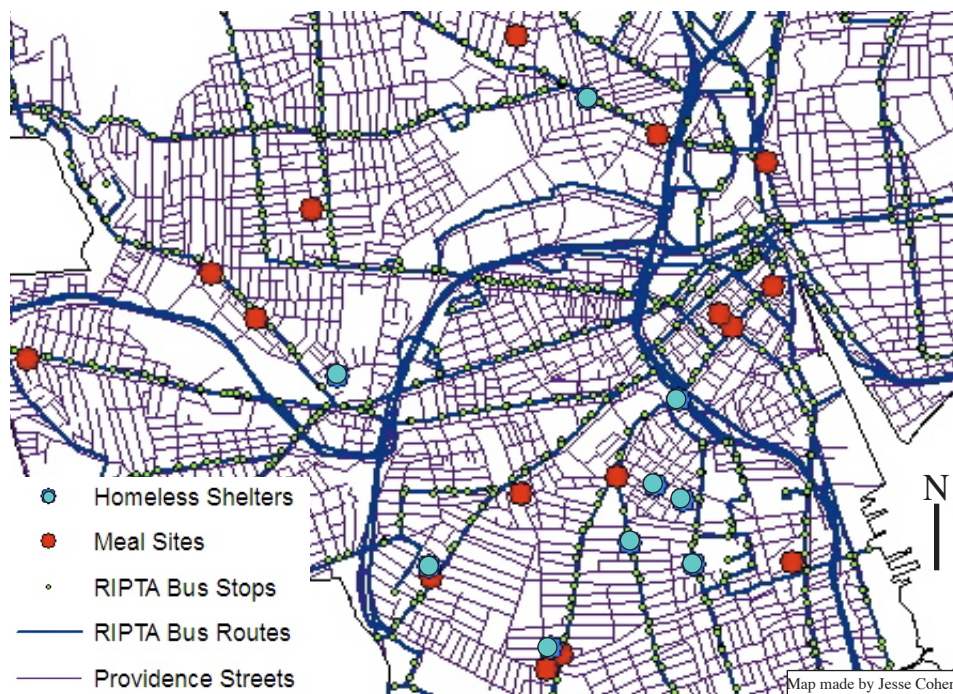
Homeless Services and RIPTA - Jesse Cohen '07

Rhode Island has a homelessness problem. According to the Rhode Island Coalition for the Homeless, the homeless shelters in this state, “continue to reach overflow capacity.” For four years running, Rhode Island shelters have served more persons than any year prior.¹ Homeless shelters and meal centers intend to serve the homeless population, but they are troubled by their location, deficiencies in the public bus system, and recent policy decisions.

RIPTA system maps conform to feature the travel time between stops; consequently, they distort area and shape, and for the most part, omit intersecting streets. Thus, a previous working knowledge of the area to which one is traveling is required in order to navigate the system. Further, it is impossible to get to many locations in Providence without at least one transfer. Successive bus rides can be expensive, and waiting time is uncomfortable in poor weather. These problems are compounded for homeless individuals that rely on public transportation in order to access shelters and meal services.

Several free meal sites are located close to Kennedy Plaza, clustered in Downtown Providence. Conversely, the shelters are more dispersed throughout the city. While all of the meal sites and shelters are proximate to bus routes, they are not all proximate to the same bus routes, elongating and complicating travel plans.

Public transit is the primary mode of transportation, besides



walking, for the homeless, and Kennedy Plaza remains the RIPTA hub. Yet, there is no daily service provider for the homeless on the downtown side of I-95, which bisects the service providers and the transportation hub.

Crossroads, a major homeless intake center for the city, was located quite close to Kennedy Plaza a decade ago, before downtown revitalizations under the reign of Mayor Buddy Cianci. At this time Crossroads moved across I-95 to its present location at Broad Street. A decade after this move, Crossroads remains the closest daily provider to Kennedy Plaza.

A further threat to the homeless service network is underway. In 2006, Rhode Island governor Don Carcieri announced the State's support of the State Police plan to build new barracks. Speculation over the location of this barracks grew, and eventually included the current location of Cranston-based Welcome Arnold, Rhode Island's largest homeless shelter. The governor has pledged to replace the

100 lost beds, but has yet to propose a specific plan for where they will be located.²

There are currently two major problems that planners and policy makers need to address. The first is the replacement for Welcome Arnold. The geographic placement of any new shelter or transitional shelter should alleviate some of the travel complications imposed on the individuals and families who use its services. The second issue, bettering the logistics of the RIPTA system, relates to the placement of homeless services, and can be addressed directly. The system maps, the cost and confusion for users can be improved through better communication. Ultimately, the State should consider all relevant stakeholders when selecting new sites for homeless shelter beds and should address barriers to homeless services erected by problems with RIPTA.

¹ "Facts." RI Coalition for the Homeless. 24 July 2006. Rhode Island Coalition for the Homeless. <http://www.rihomeless.com/emergency_housing.htm>.

² Polichetti, Barbara. "State Police Plan Displaces Homeless Shelter." The Providence Journal 9 June 2006, sec. A: 01. LexisNexis Academic.

Prescribed Vernacular: Wal-Mart and New Urbanists Hold Hands - John Wooster '07

New Urbanism is entering adolescence. The only thing more frightening than their elitist design professionals is the next generation: developers. As New Urbanism enters uncharted territories of mainstream acceptance, their success has finally caught up to their arrogance.

The New Urbanism movement is best described as a return to urbanism of old through zoning and a density scale (which they call transects). New Urbanism is more a line of thinking than a style. The finished project--be it a building, large urban infill, or a planned suburban community--reflects consideration of its local surroundings and regional needs. In addition, advocates promote pedestrian communities that provide all encompassing live/work/play zones. Privileging public space and community life over paranoid and anti-democratic gated communities, New Urbanist developments signal a preference shift to urbanity. These principles, of course, are in theory.

In practice, the lofty goals of New Urbanism are occasionally met. The most frequently cited issue is the authenticity of place. A 1990s film, *The Truman Show*, showcased one of the model New Urbanist developments: Seaside, Florida. The community is marked by its insipid selection of whites, oppressive geometry, and suffocating sterility. Combined, these elements have drawn criticisms as calculated, manufactured, and disingenuous urbanism. With their large single-family homes and two-car garages, Seaside and many other New Urbanist communities have sacrificed sustainable principles and targeted a higher economic class for the creation of a community that

privileges regularity and profit.

At the same time, these communities have done so sensationally well with respect land value appreciation. Seaside and similar developments have experienced phenomenal growth and as a result increasing mainstream acceptance from the larger building community. Within a decade of founding New Urbanism, the professional organization had in excess of 2,000 members across the United States and 20 countries.

Enter Hurricane Katrina and regional devastation. With that same blow came a one-time opportunity for academic, design, and business professionals. Katrina quickly and relatively quietly transitioned from national tragedy to entrepreneurship opportunity.

Pass Christian, Mississippi was among the devastated communities. It had experienced over a 70% decline in population and approximately a 90% drop in the tax base. New Urbanists descended on the town as well as 10 other Gulf Coast sites to stage an intensive planning intervention. True to their charrette process architects, engineers, planners, city officials, and stakeholders worked in collective participation.

Thirteen site-specific design principles were generated to guide the plan's development. Among them there was an expressed interest in walkable communities, accessible convenience stores, and close schools.

The shiny neon pink elephant in the room was Wal-Mart. In many respects, Wal-Mart is Pass Christian. On any given month the store constitutes 90% of sales tax revenue for the town and accounts

for roughly a quarter of all annual revenue. In post-Katrina Pass Christian, where 2700 of the 3600 buildings were destroyed, Wal-Mart had to come back.

But how?

New Urbanists, long-time opponents of big box retailers, seized the return of Wal-Mart in Pass Christian as an opportunity to develop a new large-scale retail building typology. Using their transects, traditional neighborhood design pattern books (no joke), and local design principles, a vision for the Wal-Mart Village was born. In the plan a new Wal-Mart fronted the main road, boutique retail shops wrapped the façade, and a single-family home neighborhood surrounded the retail district.

The rendering reveals, however, that the plan is just a veil. Dressing Wal-Mart with a shell of independent stores is simply hiding the retail behemoth. Beyond aesthetic the plan unapologetically places Wal-Mart at the epicenter of town activity. At the core is Wal-Mart itself, surrounded by smaller stores and an outer ring of housing.

The veil itself, speaks to larger issues with New Urbanism and the movement's reliance on repackaging the same product. Houses can be moved to front the streets, parking lots placed behind stores, and buildings occupied by a variety of uses. But is that a movement? Advocates should be challenged to develop a nuanced new urbanism that looks beyond building placement. Context-sensitive principles should be derived from an economic plan for long-term sustainability.

For now, the Wal-Mart Village is in limbo. Coming soon to Lowe's, however, are ready-to-assemble

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Flaws in the Legislation and New York’s Execution of Urban Renewal - Itiah Thomas ‘07

This article is a truncated version of a twenty-three page term paper written in December of 2006 for Brown University Professor Robert Self’s “Urban Crisis” seminar. It is an investigation of New York City’s approach to urban residential renewal from 1930-1960 and the effects that this program had on the social and physical structure of the city.

Under the aegis of Robert Moses, head of the New York City Housing Authority, strategies of slum clearance, public housing, and government funding to improve city housing conditions and evolve the spatial organization of its population existed in New York before many other cities. New York’s history of residential renewal illustrates the prevalence of public stimulation of the private sector to induce housing redevelopment and of slum demolition to correct the ills of blighted areas. Despite the innovative approach, by 1960 New Yorkers held the sentiment that urban renewal was failing.

Slum demolition outpaced public housing construction as simultaneous mass clearances left minimal housing for people to temporarily or permanently relocate. There was a lack of real-time documentation of site demolitions and tenant dislocation. This could have led to better synchronization of public housing construction with redevelopment projects among the agencies. Tenant relocation and destruction of community life were taken for granted as casualties of redevelopment. Increased land coverage of new site buildings won over the planning for common community amenities in new projects, which could have eased

the transition.¹

Moses was strongly against building residential projects on vacant land, though it would ease the number of displaced tenants. According to him, this would have circumvented the goal of the program, which was to eliminate slums and rebuild on the cleared land, not preserve them while building elsewhere. Because of his staunch belief and the fact that slums often consisted of densely built tenement blocks, when the Housing Authority or private developer embarked upon a project, many structures had to be cleared. It was not until 1954 when amendments were made to the 1949 Housing Act that urban renewal funding was extended to the rehabilitation of deteriorating housing as well as the demolition of deteriorated structures. But because Moses did not believe in rehabilitation he did not support the amendment, voting to destroy structures that could have been saved.

Moreover, changes in Federal legislation encouraged less housing to be built. The 1954 Housing Act stipulated that 90% of the new project has to consist of residential units. In the subsequent Acts of 1959 and 1961 that requirement was reduced to 80% and 70% respectively.²

Although Moses’ unwavering personality accounted for much of what he was able to accomplish in NYC housing, he could not have done it without the support of liberal

reformers, the political environment surrounding WWII and concessions from city and state governments and planners who may have disagreed with his tactics, but were impressed with his physical ends. Though Moses did help to clear many slums, modernize areas, get the private sector involved with city rebuilding, hold on to the middle class and increase the City’s tax base, urban renewal was still considered a failure by 1960. This is largely because of the crude nature of large-scale slum clearance, ruthless methods and Project Approach. It also failed because social concerns such as where to house dislocated people were inadequately addressed. By bulldozing homes and businesses and replacing them with middle to upper class housing and public works projects, urban renewal typically worsened conditions in New York by spreading the problem to other parts of the city. However, New York’s experience with early slum-clearing methods put it in a position to learn from its mistakes and look towards a more comprehensive planning movement that would incorporate the existing neighborhood fabric while redeveloping low income areas.³

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New Urbanist Katrina Cottages. So in short, New Urbanism fanfare is growing, but not nearly as fast as corporate cooptation or as quickly as its founding principles are surrendered.

¹ Schwartz, Harry, Planning for the Lower East Side, New York: Praeger, c1973

² Chung, Hyung C, The economics of residential rehabilitation: social life of housing in Harlem, New York: Praeger c1973

³ http://www.fanniemaefoundation.org/programs/hpd/pdf/hpd_1102_edintro.pdf

Learning from Chinatown - James Njoo

In the final sequence of Roman Polanski's 1974 film, *Chinatown*, set in 1930s Los Angeles, the viewer looks out towards a distant city centre along a sparsely lit main street at night. Crowds of Asian immigrants gather in an attempt to see the aftermath of a shootout. The camera slowly rises above the roofscape, gradually detaching the viewer from the perceptual environment of the characters. The main character, Jake Gittes, a private detective played by Jack Nicholson, turns back one more time to look at the corpse of his former lover and client. His associate discourages him: "Forget it, Jake... it's Chinatown".

The imaginary of Chinatown and its various representations have often coincided with a traditional conception of the urban outskirts: a harbour for marginal activities, a disinherited zone on the edge of civility populated by outcasts and misfits. Poverty and vice but also spontaneity, mobility and chaos are recurrent themes set against the exotic backdrop of Chinatown. To some extent these representations are legitimated since many ethnic enclaves originally settled in underdeveloped areas outside municipal control. But Chinatown today appears as a global metropolitan phenomenon inhabiting both the centre and the periphery, that which is "almost alright"¹ and that which is politically correct. Somewhere between the exotic and the banal, the authentic and the kitsch, Chinatown questions the labile contours of contemporary urbanity.

¹ See Robert Venturi, Denise Scott-Brown, and Steven Izenour, *Learning from Las Vegas*, Cambridge (Mass.), MIT Press, 1972.

The 13th arrondissement of Paris is the home of what is arguably Europe's largest Chinatown. In the mid-1970s, a massive Diaspora of Southeast Asians arrived in France at the close of the Vietnam War with the ensuing upheaval in the French colonies. Most of them settled in the Paris region, curiously enough on the Southeast border. But more than sheer size, density, or even location, what best characterises the identity of this particular Chinatown is its uncanny marriage of form and function, the creative appropriation of existing structures for unexpected uses. In the local McDonald's, a large mural painting presents to its customers the veritable "centre" of this *Petite Asie*: a raised platform of 1960s/1970s modernist towers and slabs known as *Les Olympiades*. In the unlikely setting of the *dalle*, the French word for "deck" – a type of urbanism generally criticised today for its rigidity, autonomy, and inability to generate "place", the inhabitants of Chinatown discover a "hidden" architecture of maximum possibility.²

² For a more detailed history of Les

Pedestrian deck, or "dalle" at Les Olympiades, Paris, France.



Les Olympiades covers approximately an area of 7,8 hectares, roughly one half of the total area of the Chinatown district. It is strategically located just within the limits of Paris *intramuros* on the site of a former freight station which is integrated underneath the pedestrian platform suspended 8 metres above street level. A privately financed operation, *Les Olympiades* is originally marketed as a "prestige" condominium residence intended for young upper middle class white collar workers. The initial project, a veritable "city within a city" equipped like an Olympic village, promises 4 500 apartments, 25 000 m² of offices, arranged in a series of orthogonal blocks – 10 towers 32-34 storeys high, 3 slabs of 15-18

Olympiades, see Michelle Guillon and Isabelle Taboada-Leonetti, *Le triangle de Choisy, un quartier chinois à Paris*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 1986. See also Yves Dubalen, Panos Mantziaris, and Jean-Louis Violeau, "Dalle Italie. Détournement et subversion par l'usage", *AMC Le Monde*, n° 113, Feb. 2001, pp. 64-71. A shorter version of the article is included in the exhibition catalogue, *Mutations*, Bordeaux/Barcelona, Arc en Rêve/Actar, 2000.



storeys. A 24 000 m² pedestrian deck accommodates 2 shopping centres, a supermarket, a skating rink, a swimming pool, a gymnasium, day care, 2 nursery schools, a library, and 4 000 private parking spaces. An immense “yuppie” enclave organised according to the principles of post war modern planning –high-rise blocks, open space, a rational separation of functions and circulation.

Les Olympiades opens in 1972 to positive reviews in the press while its occupation proves on the contrary to be slow and difficult. Vacancies persist and many of the public amenities such as schools and day care have yet to be implemented. The residents, generally content with their new standard of living, deplore nonetheless the puritanical use of concrete and the quality of certain common spaces such as the deck, not to mention the shared costs relative to their maintenance. Too grey, too dense, too empty, too expensive, the city of tomorrow remains a difficult reality.

1974 –the year the new French government definitively stops high-

rise development in favour of the “traditional city”– the Southeast Asian community arrives in the neighbourhood and finds the vacant housing it needs. Empty retail spaces on and inside the pedestrian deck are progressively transformed into Asian restaurants, supermarkets, speciality shops, karaoke bars, beauty salons, hi-fi outlets, even places of worship. The freight station, still owned by the national railway company, becomes an important Asian import-export centre and warehouse. 10 years later, *Les Olympiades* is the largest Chinatown in Europe.

The initial conception of the *Les Olympiades* as an elite private residence removed from its working class neighbourhood, becomes on the contrary an urban hub between centre and periphery, a crossroads for communication and flux. The vertical separation of functions dear to the Athens Charter is short circuited by the Asian community structure superimposed on the structure of the *dalle*. The different regional associations (Wenzhou, Teochow, Cantonese,

Pekinese, Shanghaiese, Fuchinese, Hainanese...) comprising a diversity of origins, dialects, philosophies, and religions (not without antagonism or competitive rivalry), organise themselves in section not plan through an improvised network of elevators, service entrances and emergency exits. A vertical archipelago, where in the towers, for example, living and work mingle albeit in a discrete if not clandestine manner. Or like in the stratification of the deck where administration, politics, religion, business, leisure are stacked in various community “poles” –a neighbourhood association on the deck, a Buddhist temple below, a recreational den or warehouse at the level of the station.

In this form of micro-Manhattanism at the scale of Chinatown, the opacity of the architecture acquires an urban value. Whereas the architects of *Les Olympiades* saw their repetitive concrete facades as a tool to fight against social segregation (i.e. a public housing tower looks no different than a private condominium), the Asian community interprets the discrepancy between container and contained as an area of unexplored freedom. A form of architectural lobotomy in which, as Koolhaas defines it, certain mental disorders of the city are relieved by disconnecting thought processes from emotions, the monolith of *Les Olympiades* “spares the outside world the agonies of the continuous changes raging inside it.”³

The private status of the pedestrian deck “open to public circulation”, like the escalators,

3 Rem Koolhaas, *Delirious New York, A Retroactive Manifesto for Manhattan* [1978], Rotterdam, 010 Publishers, 1994, p. 101.

stairs, ramps providing access, or the roads traversing the site underneath, questions the limits of public space as it enters the private domain. But within this “protected” territory of the deck, somewhere in-between the over determined zones of leisure, commerce and circulation (which in plan symptomatically resemble an outdoor shopping mall), the resident population of *Les Olympiades* –not only the Asian community, but also those coming from the West Indies, Maghreb, and France⁴– discovers

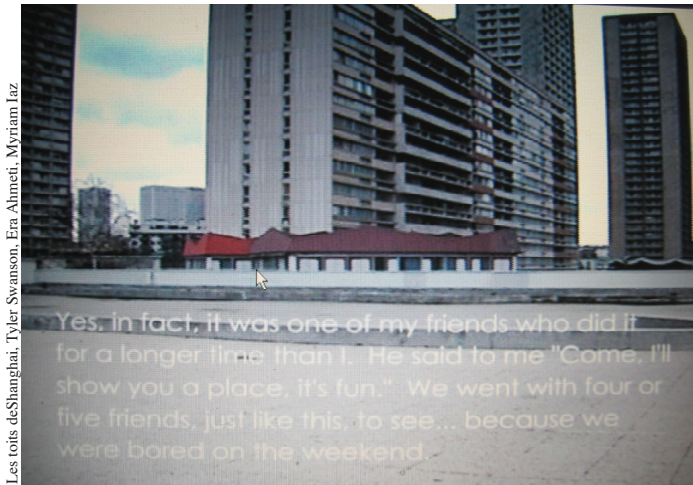
4 On the ethnic identity of *Les Olympiades* see Anne Raulin, *L’ethnique est quotidien. Diasporas, marchés et cultures métropolitaines*, Paris, L’Harmattan, 2000. As the author notes, the image of the

the informal premises of an invisible mutant playscape. Children invent games, appropriate the open spaces for social gatherings, for sports like soccer, tennis, cycling, roller skating, parkour... or even to be alone, such as on the “inaccessible” roof terraces of certain buildings, thus subverting even horizontally the rational separation of functions and circulation.

Through the cohabitation of different uses and social patterns, never formally modernised but constantly submitted to the relentless pressure to adapt and expand, *Les Chinatown* district of *Les Olympiades* is essentially defined by the visible presence of Asian commercial activity in the area.

Olympiades has survived through a regime of arbitrary rules grounded more in sensibility than in logic. A model of urbanity that blurs the distinction between periphery and centre, inside and outside –a Chinatown where improvisation triumphs over foresight.

Video Still photographs from a February 2006 urban studies workshop directed by James Njoo and Kent Fitzsimons, which focused on post-war deck urbanism in Paris, bringing together students from Columbia GSAPP New York-Paris program, Paris-Malaquais School of Architecture, and Rice School of Architecture Paris.



Les toits deShanghai, Tyler Swanson, Era Ahmeti, Myriam Iaz



Les toits deShanghai, Tyler Swanson, Era Ahmeti, Myriam Iaz



Looking for Tang frères, Nina Parvaresh, Tamy Potasz, Wendy Gilmartin



Rue du Disque, Mercedes Cornejo, Anna Goodman, Clémence La Sagna, Elodie Le Roy

A Student and a Teacher - Jack Walsh '09

I traveled to Arusha, Tanzania last summer to teach English at Tekua, a school run by volunteers. It is an inland city with little to moderate tourism, and I rarely felt sheltered or separated from the culture because of the nature of my work and the ambiance of the city itself. I learned more traveling through the city like a native and talking to people face to face than I did by sitting in a car

My time at the school personalized the experience so that beyond seeing differences in the physical city, I witnessed differences in attitude. Students made no excuses and went to extreme lengths to learn, often walking miles to and from the school. Their career ambitions were interesting, and also somewhat tragic from our perspective: the students wanted to be tour guides, secretaries, or teachers. Since tourism is the leading revenue generator in Tanzania, the tour guide industry is competitive. The desire to join that trade is understandable, but it is unfeasible that each student will attain that goal. Outside of the school, the people of Arusha were so welcoming it was almost embarrassing: one afternoon a man invited me to his house for tea shortly after we met and traded stories. I had to decline the offer due to another volunteer event, but his hospitality amazed me.

Regarding the city infrastructure, transportation and streetlights impacted me the most. Their connection to street-life and commerce was notable. The primary road through the city, which continues on to Mount Kilimanjaro, is the main corridor for virtually everything. Along it, soda vendors reuse glass bottles, so that buyers

must return them after use. Fanta and Coca-Cola bottle tops form a street-wide mosaic on dirt roads.

The main road is flooded with small buses about the size of a Chevrolet Suburban, called “dolla dollas.” This reference is an interesting association to American currency—particularly considering Tanzanians use Schillings—and tourism. Each bus is privately owned, so the drivers and fare collectors honk, hang out of their vehicle, and solicit any prospective passengers. Three rows of sparsely padded seats and metal floors force people to cram, as there will be up to 30 people at a time; getting a seat is a luxury, not a provision. Since the buses provide personal commuting, commercial transportation and limousine service, locals sometimes carry goats or chickens with them, contributing cacophonous sounds and pungent smells.

A more subtle observation of the city infrastructure and its resonating effect is the absence of streetlights. It was amazing to notice how big an impact such a trivial thing had on a community. No one, locals included, would walk the street past dusk due to the risk of crime. The notion of increased safety and comfort in areas of heightened activity manifested itself everywhere. Foreigners especially would stay on the most traveled paths, partly out of fear of the unknown side streets. The Arusha economy dramatically reflected this phenomenon: A wood carving or ebony elephant on the main road might cost five times the price of the same item, or perhaps a better or more artistic version, two blocks up a dirt road.



Photograph taken by Jack Walsh

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