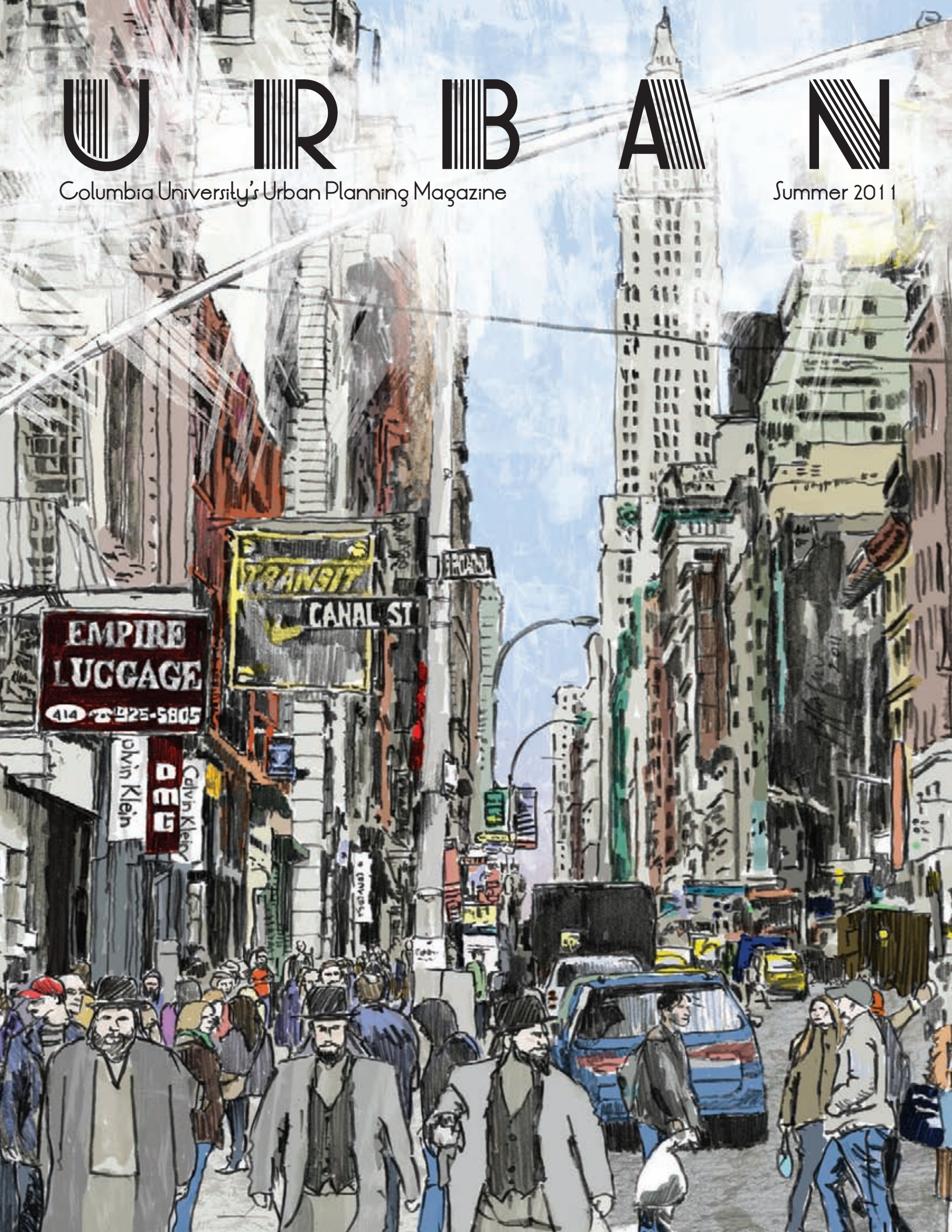


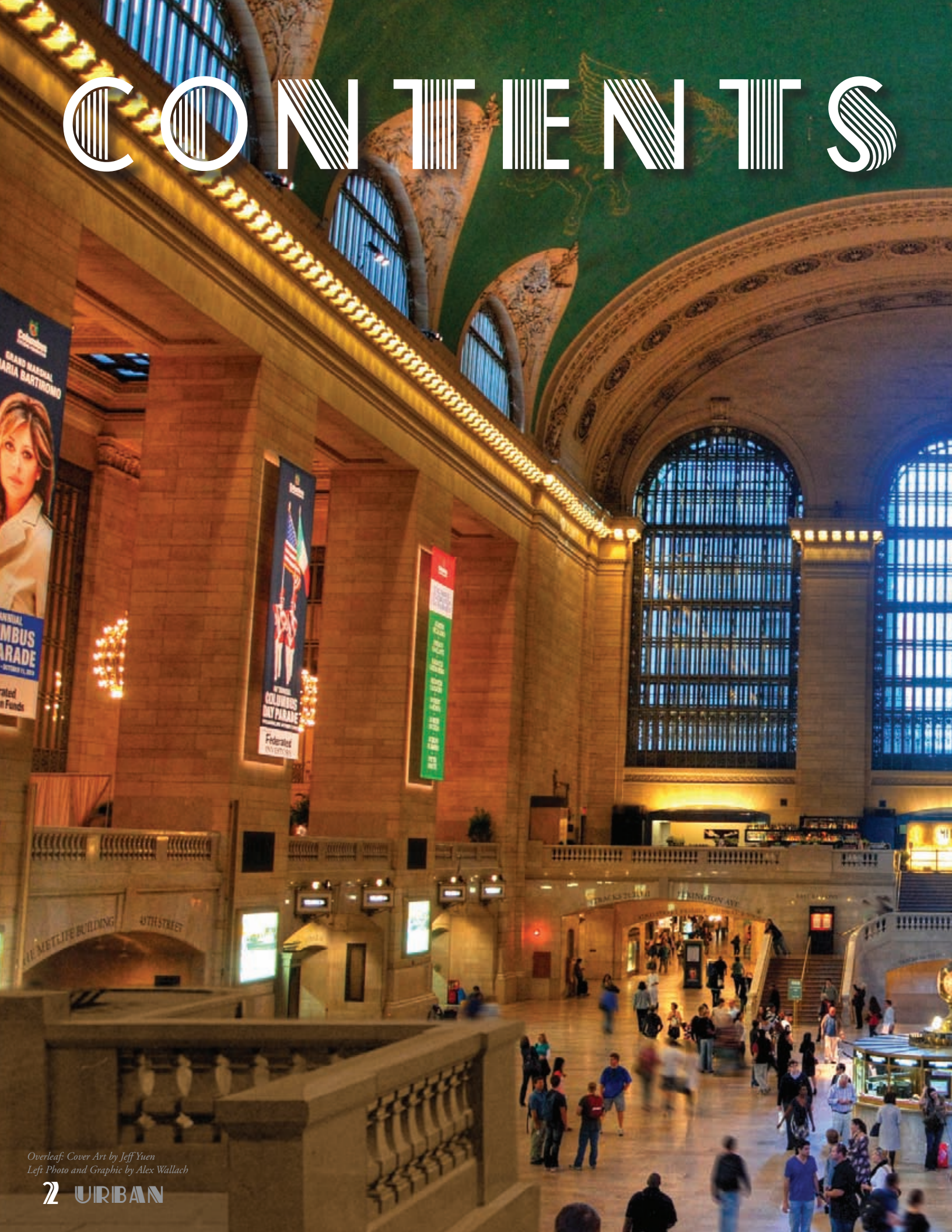
U R B A N

Columbia University's Urban Planning Magazine

Summer 2011



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URBAN

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LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

In this issue we hit the streets of New York, Toronto, Rome and Rio de Janeiro, exploring street mazes, gentrification, city building, and power brokers. In these vastly different urban centers, streets are the eminent equalizers. They are their city's greatest public forums as well as social spaces. They drive the economy, invite exploration, and are a reflection of how a society prioritizes different forms of mobility. More importantly, streets are the threads that knit the urban fabric together.

But it isn't always this way. Threatened by urban renewal, highway expansions and the whims of global finance, cities are in many ways only just recovering from decades of decline when streets became isolating barriers, dividing communities and making neighborhoods less inviting. In this issue, we explore how street life has contributed to the resilience of cities and how it has informed the planning process.

From public housing and bike lanes to street life and aging infrastructure, this maturing process has been anything but smooth. Public housing and transportation remain in fiscal crises that challenge many of the long-fought gains cities have made over the decades. Today, these troubles are opening the door to new ideas and strategies that are rethinking the knowledge of previous generations, just as was done half a century ago.

Embedded in today's streets are clues of this turbulent history. So which ideas remain relevant, which should be updated, and what new ones are needed? We ask this question with an eye to the past and an ear to the pavement in the hopes that yesterday's steps forward will not be tomorrow's steps back.





Photo by Rembert Browne

THRIFTING LIKE A PRO

A VETERAN FLEA MARKETER TOURS NEW YORK'S THRIFTIEST SCENE

Rembert Browne

Master of Science in Urban Planning, 2012

Last year, after a considerably awkward brunch with a lady friend, I wandered around Brooklyn, aimlessly, until I suddenly heard music blasting from a playground. As I walked closer, the music got louder and the smell of grilled artisanal cheeses and flannel shirts intensified. I knew I was in the right place. This was my official introduction to flea markets in New York City.

I'm no hoarder, but I do like things. New things that come in pristine packaging? Not so much. Old things that have had multiple owners, one of whom left a ketchup stain that's never coming out? Yes. Do I enjoy spending money? No. Will I spend money on something that makes me (or someone else) happy? Absolutely.

It is for these reasons that I choose to spend a significant amount of my free time thrifting. My previous two homes, Atlanta and Hanover, New Hampshire, were goldmines when it came to thrift stores. Items that you could only dream of could be found in each town's respective Salvation Armies. It wasn't until I moved to New York in August 2009, however, that I discovered a world that simply puts thrift establishments to shame.

The weekend Flea Market.

Fast-forward to 2011 and my obsession with this unique subculture had reached an all-time high. I was attending multiple markets a weekend—every weekend—often cancelling other plans that involved Saturday or Sunday between 11am and 6pm. As time grew on, my fascination with the markets went from solely the items being sold to the interesting ways these flea markets carved out spaces for themselves in the city.

The first thing to understand about flea markets in NYC is that it is a very seasonally-driven operation. Many markets have indoor locales in the colder months and outdoor locales once it's time to break out the flip-flops. Regardless of whether they are indoors or outdoors, flea markets are an impeccable example of successful ways to optimize underutilized space.

The three main flea markets that I cycle between are the Brooklyn Flea (varying locations in Williamsburg and Fort Greene), The Market NYC (NoLita), and GreenFlea (Upper West Side). Between just these three fleas, they have managed to take advantage of outdoor basketball courts, indoor gymnasiums, school cafeterias, an old bank, and various building hallways.

Each flea has its own way of operating and its own type of good that is most commonly sold. Although Morningside Heights has slightly decreased my level of downtown snobbery, I still love travelling to North of Little Italy on a Sunday afternoon to The Markets NYC. This is the weekend flea you want to attend if you like all things handmade. Jewelry is probably the most commonly sold item, followed by custom made clothes, handmade bags, and other custom-made household accessories. The collector in me usually strikes out at The Markets NYC, but every now and then someone will be selling something so unique I can't pass it up.

If you're trying to just take a study break from Avery Hall, a closer flea is GreenFlea. Sponsored by the IS44 Parents Association, GreenFlea is very much the opposite of The Markets NYC. The flea is essentially an indoor and outdoor walking tour of the school, with personal collectibles displayed and on sale wherever there is room. About 80% of the items at GreenFlea are things that were sitting in someone's attic for the duration of the 80s, 90s, and 00s.

After winding through playgrounds and hallways, the flea market empties out into the delta that is the cafeteria. In this cafeteria, it becomes very apparent that GreenFlea is as much a socializing destination as it is a marketplace. Whereas at The Markets NYC individual vendors tend to stick to themselves, the considerably older crowd of sellers at GreenFlea look as concerned with catching up with friends as they are with selling their items. The atmosphere is so relaxing the sellers seem more excited to be getting rid of things they no longer need than they are to make money. After five visits in 2011, I'm now the proud owner of a set of old pipes, a Dukakis presidential


pin, and an old bowtie that my seller thinks she bought at the old Sears Roebuck store last millennium.

By this point, the takeaway from this article should be that there are flea markets in the city other than Brooklyn Flea. That said, my favorite place in New York City might be the Brooklyn Flea.

It's a much larger production than the other two, but it is also a nice hybrid in terms of clientele, goods, the demographics of sellers, and overall atmosphere. While I do prefer the outdoors to the indoors, the winter months saw the Brooklyn Flea take residence in the old Williamsburg Savings Bank, one of the more picturesque buildings in the five boroughs. In this beautiful building, I could look at collectibles and old clothes, watch people conducting photo shoots and marvel at art and jewelry for hours on end.

After being on your feet for multiple hours, your stomach starts rumbling and you realize everyone coming from the basement smells delicious. The downstairs area has about six or seven food vendors, most of which use the Brooklyn flea as their second location in addition to their food truck or (in terms of packaged foods like pickles or salsas) website. The wonderful thing about this downstairs – in addition to the food – is that this area used to be the old bank vault. Thankfully the architecture of the vault has been kept intact, so as you walk from stoop to stoop, room to room, you pass massive, 20-foot metal vault doors. After you stuff your face with a lobster roll, you lethargically turn left to realize there is a 3rd floor of items to be perused.

Go to these flea markets if you've never been. And if you're with me, don't allow me to buy another flannel shirt.

No one needs 17. 



CROWDSOURCING THE CITY

NEW SOCIAL MEDIA TOOLS USHERING PLANNING INTO THE DIGITAL AGE

Georgia Bullen

Master of Science in Urban Planning, 2011

You might be tired of hearing about it — or you might not know what it means — but something called “crowdsourcing” is making its way into the planning lexicon. Last fall, professor Sarah Williams offered a class called “Crowd Sourced City: Social Media & Planning Processes,” where students worked with five different organizations to think about ways to use social media and mobile technologies to address engagement, advocacy, and planning.

Crowdsourcing is the practice of using data and ideas gathered from the public. It’s controversial and takes a different shape in every context where it’s used, which range from advocacy, social networking, marketing and crisis management. Some organizations that worked with Columbia students in the fall were ready to think about innovative ways to use it, while others were not.

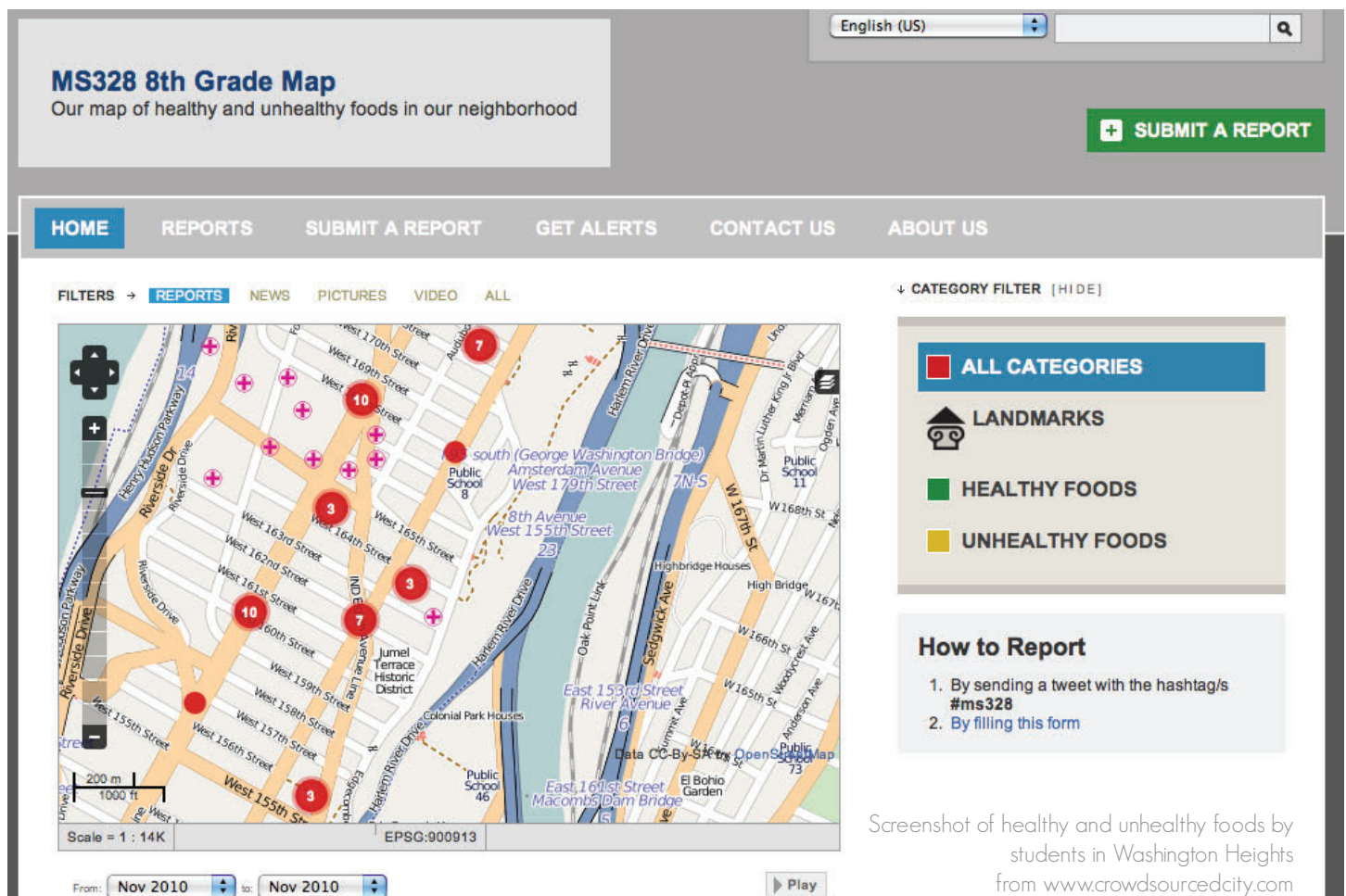
The organizations — Transportation Alternatives, The Design Trust for Public Space / Fashion BID, Common Ground, the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, and Middle School 328 — all came with different goals, issues, and levels of involvement. Each created interesting challenges for the students. The Columbia groups were interdisciplinary: they included students from SIPA and GSAPP in urban design, architecture, planning, public policy and development policy. For many, using the technology was a new learning experience in and of itself.

The seven projects that resulted focused on food and healthy living; building a cycling community and improving bicycle awareness; heightening the visibility of the garment district and its role in the city’s economy; and connecting residents in Brownsville, Brooklyn by bringing people’s memories and stories to the streets.

Ultimately all of the projects came back to a few main questions: who is the crowd? How can the crowd be engaged or enticed to participate? What kind of information does this process provide, and what kind of affect does it have on the community using it?

By the end of the semester, each of the groups and their partner organizations had a planning project in the beta stage. Each one is innovative in its own way and uses technology in ways that are new to planning. Although the students found that crowdsourcing can more often complicate issues than simplify them, it holds great potential to usher planning into the digital age by better utilizing the power of social media to solve social problems. **U**

To learn more about these crowdsourcing projects, see: <http://www.crowdsourcedcity.com>.



Screenshot of healthy and unhealthy foods by students in Washington Heights from www.crowdsourcedcity.com



Photo by Joe M500 on Flickr

Demolition of Cabrini-Green Housing, Chicago

A POINTMAN IN PUBLIC HOUSING

AN INTERVIEW WITH JOSEPH SHULDINER

Michael Snidal

Master of Science in Urban Planning, 2012

Joseph Shuldiner was the director of public housing in Chicago, Los Angeles, and New York City and a former assistant secretary of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). In 1995, he oversaw the transfer of the Chicago Housing Authority from local to federal and back to local control. He is currently the executive director of The City of Yonkers Municipal Housing Authority (MHA).

URBAN caught up with Shuldiner to hear about his experiences in Housing.

URBAN: You have run housing agencies in the three largest cities in the country and now Yonkers. What are some major differences between the housing authorities in these cities?

Schuldiner: The New York City Housing Authority was the largest by far, 186,000 public housing units and 60,000 vouchers at the time (1986-1990). The challenge was to master its size and to keep the authority running smoothly. No one wanted change or new direction. It was a very bureaucratic operation.

The Housing Authority for the City of Los Angeles was considered a “troubled” housing authority when I went there (1990-1993). At one point, the situation was so bad that the City Council disbanded the Board of Commissioners and acted as the Board itself —

an untenable approach that it abandoned after three years. Despite this, the operation was not so bad (see Chicago). One of my biggest accomplishments was that we suffered only \$27,000 in damages during the 1992 post-Rodney King decision riots.

The Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) was a mess. Its own auditors had given the audit a disclaimer that they could not rely on the data supplied by the CHA. As part of a federal takeover, I had significant resources both in terms of money and people. I was able to assemble a pretty impressive team. Also, by being part of a federal effort, we were able to avoid becoming mired in “Chicago politics.”

The Municipal Housing Authority for the City of Yonkers has most of the same issues

CONTINUES ON FOLLOWING PAGE

confronting the other authorities, an aging housing stock, too little money, gangs, etc. But the scale is so much smaller that these problems are manageable, even if not totally solvable.

URBAN: Would you take us back through your decision making process when HUD took over the CHA? In retrospect, what, if anything, would you have done differently?

Shuldiner: It was not my decision to take over the CHA. In fact, I argued against it because I felt HUD was unsuited to manage a housing authority. But there were many “reasons” to [take over the CHA], including the failure of the then administration, the support of the Mayor, the conditions, the audit disclaimer and the loss of \$24 million of pension and health benefits that was stolen by the benefits manager. But mostly it was the HUD Secretary’s desire to do something to help the residents. As for what we might have done differently, there were so many things. I guess I could have been a better politician, become closer with the Mayor. But that is all hindsight.

URBAN: There is a general consensus that concentrating low-income households in dense high-rises is a bad idea.

But are mixed income lower density programs, like Hope VI, the answer to public housing?

Shuldiner: I don’t believe high-rises are a problem. Both of my kids were raised in high-rises in NYC and Chicago. It is the concentration of poverty. European communities are much more dense than American [communities] and don’t have these problems. Besides, as the population grows, what is the alternative, there is only so much livable space on earth. I also believe that we should maximize integration by race, religion, income, sexual preference, etc.

URBAN: Are you concerned about NYCHA’s recent turn to the private sector for funding and management?

Shuldiner: I am not for or against privatization. The idea is creating affordable housing opportunities in viable communities. If government can do it, great. If not, whatever works. On the other hand, you have to be suspicious; if the private sector was able and willing to provide housing to low-income families, housing authorities would not have been created in the first place.

URBAN: Should NYCHA sell off its unused land to private developers to solve its budget problem?

Shuldiner: It depends on NYCHA’s capacity as a developer. If they have the capacity, then they can use the rights themselves. If they don’t, by all means bring in competent developers.

URBAN: Public housing authorities spend an awful lot of money on security. Is this really the best use of their resources?

Shuldiner: Security is at the heart of the social compact. You have to spend what is necessary to make the site safe. The problem is that the City doesn’t provide sufficient service so that additional security is not necessary. I rail against the money I spend for police. I believe the City should pay for it, but the reality is that at this time cities are struggling too. Hopefully this is a short-term problem. Once security is achieved, the residents will come to expect it and will raise their standards on each other. In the end, only a community can make a community safe.

URBAN: What are the biggest challenges facing the MHA?

Shuldiner: Our biggest challenges are an aging housing stock and inadequate capital funds to address their needs. Yonkers prospers, we should do ok but we have to see that we are part of the new development not left out. **U**

Rangel Houses in New York City



Photo by Jim Henderson

COLORS AND TEXTURES OF SPAIN

PHOTO ESSAY

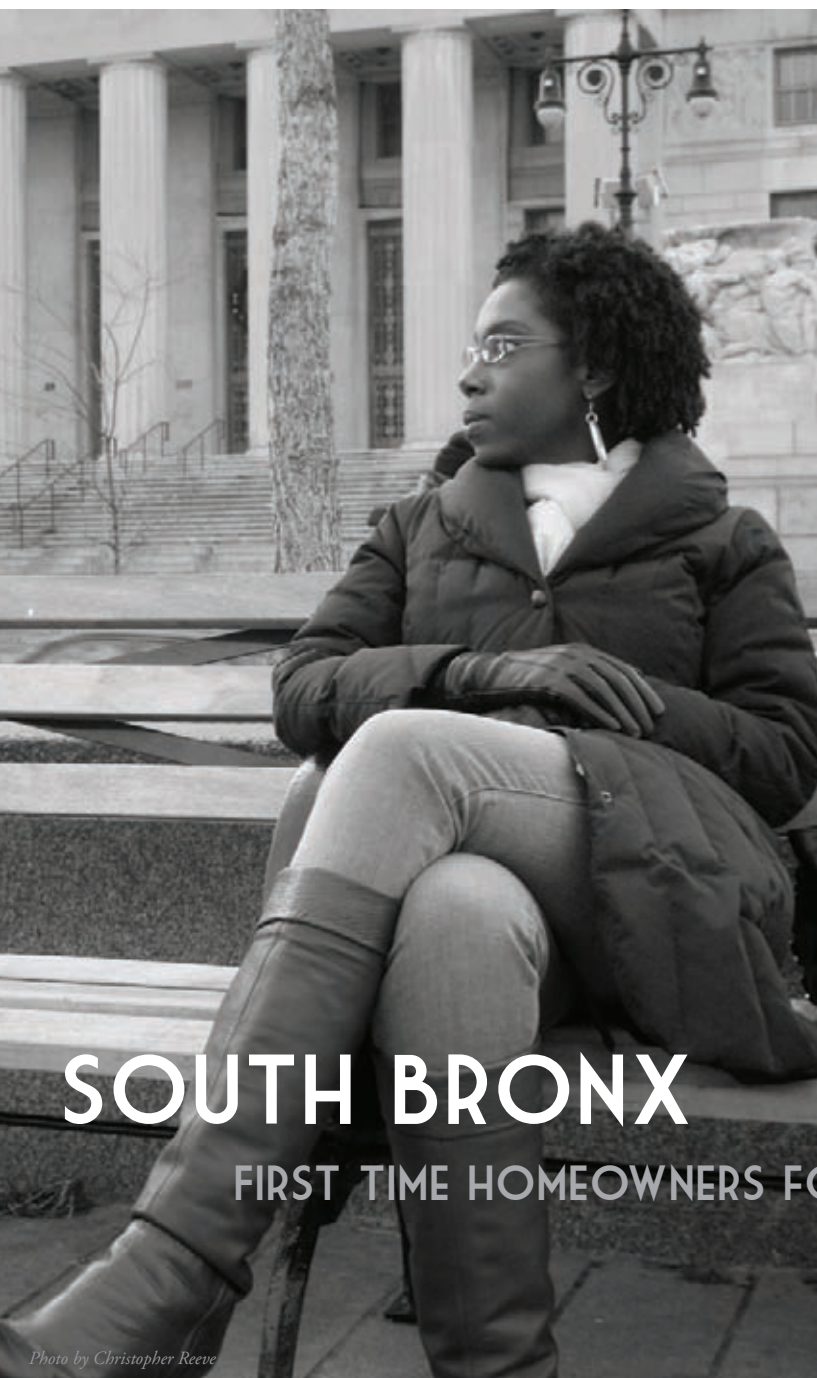


Spain's beautiful styles evoke its rich history,
and lend its cities a sense of place.



Lisa Blake

Master of Science in Urban Planning, 2012



SOUTH BRONX

FIRST TIME HOMEOWNERS FOMENT CHANGE

Photo by Christopher Reeve

South Bronx homeowners Marguerite Saint-Preux and Julio Pabon

Christopher Reeve

Master of International Affairs in 2012

The new Yankee Stadium is the largest single investment in the history of the South Bronx. But it is hardly the only one. Following the new stadium's completion in 2009, the Highbridge West Concourse neighborhood has experienced a wave of both public and private investment that is as dramatic as it is fast-paced. A new playground, skate park, and plaza now surround the

stadium and the Grand Concourse has seen extensive renovations. Parks on the banks of the Harlem River and atop a parking garage, a new courthouse and a new Metro-North station have been erected. The new Gateway Center Mall attracts shoppers from Manhattan, and new bars and eateries abound.

But another, more subtle investment

has been changing the face of the South Bronx as well: homeownership.

Challenging traditional conceptions of gentrification are many of the newest homeowners. Largely black or Latino, these men and women grew up in the neighborhood and have never owned real estate before. Today they are investing significant time and energy in

“ ”

If you can come together as a community, you can make a positive change— but it takes a lot of work, a lot of tenacity.

Michelle Dingoer

working to improve their neighborhood.

Life-long resident Julio Pabon, 58, is one of the Bronx's new homeowners. Pabon purchased his townhouse on 150th Street seven years ago, a few years before the real estate boom. Besides noting its proximity to Manhattan, Pabon saw enormous potential in a waterfront neighborhood rich in musical history and the performing arts. Pabon and others like him represent a new wave of successful Bronxites who are opting to stay in the Bronx, a dramatic reversal from past generations.

Pabon moved to the Bronx from Puerto Rico when he was four. Unlike his friends, Pabon graduated from high school and went on to college. After earning a degree in history at Lehman College in the North Bronx, Pabon worked in education, city government, business, and community activism, eventually earning a Master of Public Administration from NYU.

After moving into his townhouse on 150th Street, Pabon founded the South Bronx Community Association (SBCA), a group of local residents and business owners concerned with stoking positive change in the neighborhood. SBCA made headlines last year when it successfully petitioned the City to install speed bumps on Walton Avenue. Pabon had solicited signatures from fellow residents and promoted his cause at local Community Board meetings. Now, thanks to SBCA, cars can no longer speed down Walton Avenue, and the neighborhood is safer for residents.

Currently SBCA is working to encourage local businesses to offer discounts to residents. Pregones Theater and Haagen-Dazs ice cream parlor already do so. Pabon hopes that the neighborhood's defining attraction, the New York Yankees, will join in. He believes that the Yankees should give neighborhood residents special treatment. "These are the people putting up with the most inconveniences," he reasons, citing crowds and a lack of parking on game days.

Last year, Pabon converted his five-bedroom home into the South Bronx's first bed and

breakfast, Mi Casa Tu Casa. Today Mi Casa Tu Casa is crowded with guests from as far away as California and Puerto Rico.

Recent development in the area has garnered attention for the borough from people who might have never considered living there otherwise. Michelle Dingoer, 43, is one such resident. Originally from Australia, she has been living in New York for ten years. After living in Queens, Brooklyn, and Washington Heights in Manhattan, she was tired of "throwing away money" on rent. Although she wanted to buy in upper Manhattan, units for sale there were out of her budget. So a real estate agent living in the neighborhood convinced her to take a look. Having always associated the borough with crime, Dingoer had never once set foot in the Bronx. Dingoer admits that on her first visit, the neighborhood didn't feel quite right. Today, she couldn't be happier. She cherishes the parks and the historic buildings. But it was the newly renovated two-bedroom apartment at an accessible price that sealed the deal. "I took the plunge," she recalls.

Moving to the South Bronx was only the beginning for Dingoer. She soon became active in the maintenance of her building and its surroundings. During her second year in the neighborhood, she was elected secretary of her co-op board. In just one year in that role, Dingoer helped to increase police presence in the neighborhood, replace the unpopular building manager, and even get garbage bins for the street corners. "If you come together as a community, you can make a positive change," she says, "but it takes a lot of work, a lot of tenacity." Dingoer recently wrote to the mayor's office and the district attorney's office for additional support in keeping the neighborhood free of illegal activity.

Marguerite Saint-Preux, 30, is another new homeowner, and like Julio Pabon, is from the neighborhood. Born to Haitian parents, Saint-Preux was raised in an apartment behind the Crown Diner on Gerard Avenue. For the past six years, Saint-Preux has led a successful career in marketing and business development. Seven months ago, she decided it was time to buy a home in the old neighborhood.

Saint-Preux remembers taking note of "false starts" around her home when she was young, including the building of the Concourse Plaza shopping center. She recalls extensive renovations of the subway station. None of these projects delivered the catalytic change they promised.

But Saint-Preux is encouraged by recent developments, like the landscaping and realignment of the Grand Concourse. "They weren't just putting up dividers—they were putting up flowers!" Saint-Preux says, still shocked. As a little girl she had always been fearful of crossing the Grand Concourse, a road where traffic laws were rarely heeded. Now, she crosses the Concourse without issue.

Saint-Preux wants to ensure that locals like her get the opportunity to become homeowners. She envisions a positive cycle in which new homeowners become more proactive in maintaining the beauty and cleanliness of shared spaces, potentially spurring new interest in homeownership in the neighborhood. "I would like to encourage more people who are here to invest," Saint-Preux says. She adds that she is willing to volunteer her time to teach her neighbors about programs for first-time homebuyers.

Back at Mi Casa Tu Casa, Julio Pabon speaks of the neighborhood's past. Mill Pond Park, with its tennis courts overlooking the Harlem River, sits on land once known more for its rats, trash, and prostitutes. The Gateway Center Mall replaced an old jail, the Bronx House of Detention.

While the neighborhood retains some of the roughness that led to its longstanding reputation, today's Highbridge-West Concourse is not the South Bronx of popular memory. Instead, it's a place where the neighborhood's sons and daughters are buying homes, taking active roles in the development process, and inviting newcomers to join. **U**



Photos by Claudia Huerta



ROMA, 21ST CENTURY URBANISM

STREET MAZES & PERPENDICULAR PARKING

Publishing Editor

Claudia Huerta

Master of Science in Urban Planning, 2012

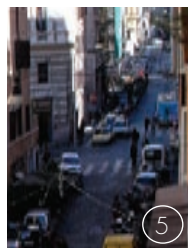
Travelling into Rome, Italy from Leonardo da Vinci Airport offers a rather underwhelming first impression of the Eternal City. On my way to visit a good friend, I landed at da Vinci on a sunny Friday afternoon only to find that driving into Rome from the airport at 6pm is like any other drive into a major city from an airport -- bumper-to-bumper rush hour traffic. To get into the old city there is one main road that starts off as a highway and then turns into a grand boulevard. My friend's apartment is in the heart of the old city, in the rione of Monti, with the Colosseum practically outside his door.

Upon entering the city, the ancient buildings and curvilinear streets at once tell of the past generations who built this enduring metropolis. While there are a few sprinkled new buildings within the older part of Rome, most of the

newer modern and more affordable buildings are outside of the Aurelian Wall. Inside, the old city is made up of neighborhoods connected by one tourist destination after another.

I spent most of my time within the Aurelian Wall of the old city, built between 271 and 275 by the Roman Emperors Aurelian and Probus as an emergency measure to protect the rapidly expanding city from Barbarian invasions. When I first visited Rome in college I was captivated by the art and cathedrals. This time I was enthralled by the city's street life.

The Roman street system is similar to other older street systems in its organic nature and rhythm, quite a reversal from New York City's grid. One is not better than the other, they are just different. The hustle and bustle in New York and Rome varies maybe not just out of



1. Perpendicular Parking
2. Streets become Sidewalks
3. Loitered Streets
4. Parallel Parking
5. Street Mazes
6. Street Terraces and Pedestrian Buffers

cultural tendencies but also out of sidewalk infrastructure.

In New York, the wide sidewalks and Euclidian grid make it easier for people to find their way and walk at fast speeds. But Rome's narrow, winding streets don't seem to deter Romans (or tourists) from walking. In some instances pedestrians use the street and sidewalks interchangeably, and when there isn't a sidewalk, people spill onto the streets — a behavior that drivers silently accommodate. There are no real crosswalks, encouraging people to traverse traffic at will.

Yet as a pedestrian you rarely fear for your safety even when not protected by sidewalks or crossing signals. The blurred boundary between places for people and cars gave us a greater appreciation for the spaces. By being forced

to pay attention, stay present and interact with the geography, instead of relying on the predictability of a grid, the public spaces of the city seemed to brim with life.

Down the road from my friend's apartment, there were evenings when the street was so full, cars were forced to squeeze through crowds like people do in a crowded bar.

Cars in general get a poor deal from the "eternal city." Its narrow streets make having a car bigger than a Mini simply impractical. Navigating Rome's parking policies is almost as difficult as its maze of streets. Many different parking zones regulate parking patterns and car garages are scarce, expensive and have inconvenient hours. For some Romans, the solution is a SMART car, a car whose length is about equal to the width of an average car, allowing

SMART car owners to park perpendicularly along the streets without worrying about being hit by traffic.

If Roman urban planners seem to have their work cut out for them in terms of traffic mitigation, public transportation and parking laws, they are also busy preserving and retrofitting the old city while building up the new Rome outside of the Aurelian Walls. Yet despite high unemployment and government scandals aplenty, the city forges on in true regal manner, through intertwining monuments and bustling streets, powered by the obligatory doppio espresso. **U**



TORONTO'S POWER BROKER

JANE JACOBS' DEATH AND LIFE OF GREAT AMERICAN CITIES TURNS 50

Content Editor

Jake Schabas

Master of Science in Urban Planning, 2012

Despite drawing on observations from the little red row house at 555 Hudson Street in Greenwich Village, for me Jane Jacobs' *Death and Life of Great American Cities* also captures the Annex neighborhood where I grew up. This experience probably isn't unique — I'm sure readers in places like Boston's North End or Hyde Park in Chicago feel the same way. Distinguishing the Annex from these other neighborhoods, however, is that it was here Jacobs chose to spend the last 38 years of her life.

I first read *Death in Life* five years ago. My first year of college had just ended and I had returned home to Toronto to look for work. It was May, and like many an arts undergrad, I was excited by the prospect of reading something for pleasure. My dad offhandedly suggested Jacobs' first book and, intrigued by the title, I picked it up.

Not knowing I was even interested in cities, reading *Death and Life* was a transformative experience. That summer, with resumes in hand, I walked to, from and along Bloor — the major commercial street passing through the Annex — looking for work. Every day the neighborhood I had grown up appeared completely changed. The opening chapter on “the use of sidewalks: safety” transformed the characteristic front porches, window watchers and pocket parks of the neighborhood into community safety mechanisms. The short blocks and mix of stores along Bloor seemed tailor-made for walkers and the old buildings were well suited to support the street's diverse start-up businesses.

While better known as the keen Greenwich Village observer who stopped Robert Moses' Lower Manhattan Expressway, in Toronto, Jacobs was known as the Organizer on Albany Street, who helped halt an entire network of inner city highways and reshaped the city.

Fresh from her victory over Moses, Jane moved from New York to the Annex in 1968. As

architect Ken Greenberg put it, “Toronto was hanging on a cliff when she arrived, braced for a full program of anti-city urban renewal measures.” The old City Hall, the city's streetcars, the grand 19th century marketplace and many other landmarks now cherished by Torontonians were slated for demolition. Three inner-city highways were about to break ground, one of which would have run right through my back yard.

That all changed when Jacobs teamed up with other civic activists in 1969 and brought a halt to the first urban expressway set to steamroll right through dense, vibrant neighborhoods. Inspired by her ideas, many members from the now famous Stop Spadina movement went on to run for City Council and swept into office in 1972. Once there, they quickly killed the entire urban expressway program and turned Jacobs' rejection of modernist planning as embodied in *Death and Life* into public policy.

In 1976, the Central Area Plan was approved for downtown Toronto, prohibiting urban renewal projects, segregated land uses and large open plazas. Meanwhile, historic buildings were preserved through density bonuses, retail was required at grade on office buildings and infill residential development was encouraged alongside office buildings. Caps were placed on new office developments that were tied to public transportation capacity, encouraging transit expansion that led to massive subway extensions built in the 1970s and 80s.

These decisions allowed Toronto to avoid the fate of many American cities whose downtowns emptied out during the 1970s. Instead, Jacobs' ideas left Toronto with a lively, mixed-use downtown and a transit system with the third highest ridership on the continent after New York and Mexico City.

Although she is better known as the project killer, Jacobs' influence on larger scale urban development plans in Toronto is also clear. In the late 1970s, the City of Toronto purchased abandoned downtown rail lands to redevelop. But instead of handing responsibility over to

planners, a citizens and housing committee was created to set development priorities. Their four priorities — that new development extend Toronto's existing street grid, that buildings face directly onto streets, be designed at a human scale and contain a mix of uses — has made the St. Lawrence neighborhood one of today's most desirable parts of Toronto.

Zoning too was radically changed. Like New York, Toronto had a comprehensive zoning plan instituted in the 1960s with a floor-area ratio dictating density. The Central Area Plan did away with that, replacing it with a units-per-acre measure that made larger residences for families and higher income households possible. This ensured that the downtown remain mixed income while public and cooperative housing development was built.

“Ideas of Jacobs' have shaped Toronto's built landscape into a unique model of urban planning that recent commentators have begun calling ‘messy urbanism.’”

If there's one thing for sure, Jacobs was no enemy of density. In the 1976 plan, densities were also substantially increased, and bonuses established for public space improvements. In the 1990s, a radical initiative spearheaded by Jacobs allowed areas to grow organically by stripping vacant industrial neighborhoods near downtown of all land use and density limits. Today, these areas are thriving mixed-use centers for living, working and the arts.

These and other ideas of Jacobs' have shaped Toronto's built landscape into a unique model of urban planning that recent commentators have begun calling “messy urbanism:” new buildings must fit into their contexts, but not necessarily match them. Instead, old and new architecture exist side-by-side, zoning codes are mostly ignored, and bike lanes, trees and benches go where they work rather than where

CONTINUES ON FOLLOWING PAGE

a formula dictates.

This gives Toronto a “less-than-manicured quality,” as L.A. planner James Rojas noted in 2007, which is as much a reflection of its inhabitants as it is of the city’s land uses codes. As Jacobs put it in *Death and Life*, “the diversity, of whatever kind, that is generated by cities rests on the fact that in cities so many people are so close together, and among them contain so many different tastes, skills, needs, supplies, and bees in their bonnets.” With half of the city’s 2.6 million residents born outside of Canada, her choice to relocate to Toronto likely involved more than just an interest in the city’s built environment.

It also speaks to her interests in national public policy that stretch beyond Toronto’s borders. Her sons were draft dodgers, underpinning their migration north. She wrote eight other books while in Toronto, ranging from *A Schoolteacher in Old Alaska: The Diaries of Hannah Breece* to *The Question of Separatism* on Quebec’s attempts to secede from the rest of Canada. At the provincial level, she was an advocate for

Toronto to separate from Ontario and become its own province. In 2006, an act pushed by Toronto Mayor David Miller (whom Jacobs had been a campaign adviser for) came into effect at the Province, strengthening Toronto’s political powers vis-à-vis other orders of government.

Now, when I’m back in Toronto, I see Jane’s influence everywhere. She has awards for magazine publications as well as civic activism named after her. On May 7th and 8th, there will be over 170 “Jane’s walks” taking place around the greater Toronto area, with another 254 occurring in 67 other cities around the world including 18 here in New York.

Unfortunately, I never actually met Jane. Despite living only blocks away from her for most of my life, she passed away on April 25, 2006 — a month before I opened *Death and Life* — leaving me to know her only by her ideas and not her person. To see Jane would have been great. Having missed the opportunity, I have retraced her steps back to New York in the hopes of learning to see *like* Jane, an alternative I think she would have preferred anyways. U

Jane Jacobs organizing in Greenwich Village, 1961



Photo from the Library of Congress



Photo by Jeff Yuen

Informal Settlements in the CONLESTE region, Brazil

THE SLICK ROAD TO REGIONALISM

GUIDING BRAZIL'S OIL-DRIVEN DEVELOPMENT IS NO EASY TASK

Staff Illustrator

Jeff Yuen

Master of Science in Urban Planning, 2012

In 2008, the Brazilian oil giant Petrobras started construction on the Rio de Janeiro Petrochemical Complex (Comperj) in the Leste Fluminense region of Rio de Janeiro State. Slated for completion in 2016, this \$20 billion complex is expected to cover an area equivalent to 6,000 soccer fields, create over 200,000 jobs, and restructure the regional economy into Brazil's principal petroleum processing hub.

The impact of Comperj has transcended the traditional boundaries of municipal government and has created the need for a new form of governance. In response, CONLESTE, a consortium of municipalities, was founded to coordinate and implement regional policies. It is currently comprised of 13 municipalities spanning an area about the size of Delaware with a population of 2.6 million people.

A number of regional issues link the CONLESTE municipalities, one of the most crucial being the provision of housing. The region has suffered from a chronic housing deficit that has fueled the expansion of the informal housing sector. Today, the CONLESTE region is home to 233 informal settlements housing 63,000 families.

Housing should be understood as more than just a physical structure, but as a bundle of rights

including access to the essential infrastructure and services that accompany full citizenship. From this perspective, the proliferation of informal settlements is troubling and represents a disconnected set of housing rights.

The size and speed of Comperj-related growth will only exacerbate the existing housing problems and increase social inequality. CONLESTE is attempting to address these challenges through the creation of a regional master plan—the first of its kind in Brazil. The regional master plan does not replace municipal plans but represents an orchestration in which the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

While the need for regional action is clear, so too are the daunting challenges facing CONLESTE as a regional governance body. Fundamental to the issue is the tenuous position of the regional agenda in the legal and political landscape.

In Brazil, the responsibility for urban planning is tackled at the municipal level, with the municipal master plan being the primary planning instrument. However, the devolution of responsibility to local government has not been backed by a corresponding increase in fiscal power. Municipalities are chronically under-funded and lack the resources and institutional capacity to plan or implement effective policy. Further, the diversity of conditions between municipalities manifests

in differing political agendas. Ultimately, this boils down to a question of political will.

Given the many challenges facing CONLESTE, there is a clear need for institutional reform to strengthen the position of the regional agenda. What kind of institutional framework and policy tools are needed for regional governance to be successful?

Economic and political reforms will be integral components to realizing a regional planning approach. CONLESTE needs to secure stable revenue sources to support its planning capacity. This revenue could come from a regional tax-share fund or a reapportionment of existing oil-based royalties. Perhaps more challenging will be the political struggle to align disparate interests and reduce municipal competition.

It remains to be seen if CONLESTE can fulfill its potential as a regional body and equitably manage the impacts of Comperj. What is clear is that in Brazil, like in other countries, the regional sphere is increasingly becoming the critical scale for planning and policy action. With more than half of the world's population living in urban areas, it is crucial to consider impacts across urban territories and political jurisdictions. Failure to do so will increase existing inequalities and undermine efforts towards social justice. **U**

THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED

RETHINKING NEW YORK CITY'S BIKE LANE STRATEGY

Staff Writer

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Master of Science in Urban Planning, 2012

Build it and they will come. Was there ever a more contentious maxim in planning discourse? As the saying implies, new infrastructure will create new users. In the world of real estate, this kind of speculation is a risky business. But there, it's the developer who absorbs that risk. In the world of public infrastructure however, it is the taxpayer who stand to lose from the gambles of the City's high commissioners.

Since 2007, New York City's Department of Transportation (DOT) has paid millions of dollars to build over 250 miles of bike lanes in the city. Unless you've been living in a cave, you've heard about the impassioned, at times maniacal response to DOT's bike lanes initiative. Press coverage has been so extensive that a New York Times Magazine writer has called the anti-bike lane argument a "burgeoning literary genre."

Among the juicier of recent controversies is the lawsuit being filed against the City by former transportation commissioner Iris Weinshall and her senator husband, citing a State law allowing citizens to "challenge arbitrary and unfair actions by the government." The unfair action in question is a bike lane below their penthouse on tony Prospect Park West in Brooklyn.

Editorialists gripe about everything from not being able to find a spot to park their gas guzzlers (The New Yorker), to deliverymen who ride against traffic (The Wall Street Journal). But the

point here is neither to defend the city's deified parking spaces nor condemn self-righteous cyclists who violate traffic laws. Instead, I question whether underused bike lanes are the best use of New York City's precious street space, especially given the questionable use of the 'pilot project' designation to put them there.

According to the DOT, daily commutes by bike into lower Manhattan have nearly doubled in the four years Sadik-Khan has held office; from 9,000 in 2007 to more than 17,000 in 2010. But these counts track only trips on seven cycling routes, including the East River bridges, the Hudson River Greenway, and four avenues on the far West Side. Most of these routes have existed since long before Sadik-Khan became transportation commissioner and have been well-used routes for decades. Without a further study, it would be impossible to attribute the recent increase in usage to Sadik-Khan's improvements along these older routes and network expansions. It is more likely that New Yorkers' attitudes about cycling have changed, perhaps in part thanks to safety and publicity efforts by Sadik-Khan's DOT.

While the percent increase in bike trips is impressive, it is building from a small base. Total bicycle trips still represent less than 1% of all commute trips made in New York City, compared to close to 20% in London, where their 60 mile network of new "cycle

superhighways" has been widely successful. And commuters account for less than 20% of all bicycle trips in New York City.

Whether and where to put bike lanes in a city can be sort of a chicken-and-egg debate. The DOT has been referencing a Department of City Planning bicycle master plan published in 1997, in addition to PlaNYC. And community hearing meetings are organized in each neighborhood planned for bike lane extensions. But the rationale behind Sadik-Khan's bike lane location decisions remains somewhat questionable: rather than implement the bike routes that make the most sense or are part of a comprehensive multi-modal transportation plan, she pursues those that are "shovel-ready," or have the most community support. These motivations are understandable from a politician's perspective, but do little good for New York City's cyclists and its other commuters.

Given the prohibitive expense of adding new rail infrastructure in today's fiscal environment, bike lanes should target areas that lack access to transit, or routes that are difficult to traverse by transit, like Manhattan's east-west streets. Instead, the bike lanes along Manhattan's north-south avenues — among the most high-profile in the city — follow the most transit-rich corridor in the city.





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1. Cyclist using the controversial Prospect Park West bike lane
2. Some bike lanes may go unused...
3. While others are repurposed.



2

Bike paths along the Hudson River waterfront and up and down Central Park are heavily used and are safe and efficient routes for cycling. They are completely separated from auto traffic and allow for long, continuous rides uninterrupted by traffic signals. Although tailored more toward recreational cyclists, these routes present good opportunities for commuters. Waterfronts throughout the city offer plentiful unused space and scenic views, and are often underserved by transit.

Cyclists have also been frustrated by the new one-way lanes. It is naïve to think that bikes should follow the same travel patterns as cars. The last thing a cyclist wants to do before commencing a grueling trek is figuring out if Eighth Avenue runs north or south. And because many of the new lanes are protected by a row of parked cars, it's not unsafe for cyclists to ride against the flow of traffic.

If bike lanes were installed on roads to increase congestion and thus shift drivers to other modes of transit, as congestion pricing aims to do, that would be a worthwhile goal. But many of New York City's drivers, like those who live far in the outer boroughs and commute to work in Manhattan, simply do not have the option to switch to other modes.

That is to say nothing of the delivery trucks, MTA buses, taxis, tour buses, paratransit vans, ambulances, and police and fire vehicles that populate much of Manhattan's road space. If the lanes were installed to protect and represent a burgeoning cycling population, that would also be a worthwhile goal. But the lanes remain underused and the city's usage statistics misleading.

Janette Sadik-Kahn's bike lanes bet is just the latest abuse of power by a city hall governance structure that is too autocratic. Of course, Bloomberg's administration is no stranger to unpopular initiatives. The mayor's smoking ban and calorie count mandate, though much maligned, have supposedly extended New Yorkers' life expectancy by more than 18 months. So maybe the bike lanes will pay off someday.

But until cycling is a popular enough mode of transit to justify the expansion of bike lanes, aren't there other, potentially better uses of the city's crowded asphalt real estate? More bus lanes (especially for bus rapid transit), wider sidewalks, outdoor seating, and permeable, planted storm drains are all feasible goals that are much in line with the department's—and the City's—interests. **U**



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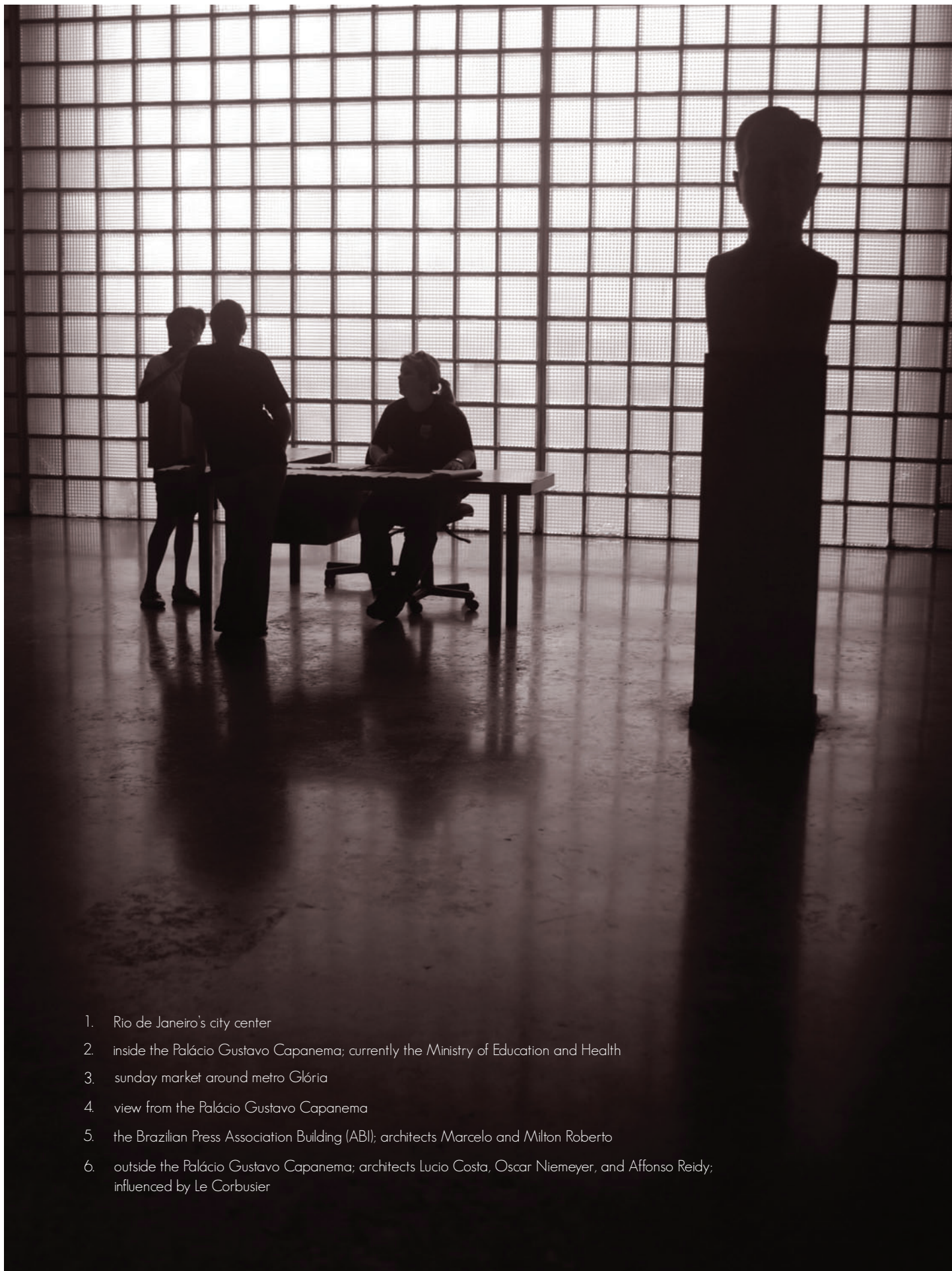
PHOTO ESSAY

MARKETS AND MODERNISM

IN RIO DE JANEIRO

Assistant Graphics Editor
Vanessa Smith

Master of Science in Urban Planning, 2012



1. Rio de Janeiro's city center
2. inside the Palácio Gustavo Capanema; currently the Ministry of Education and Health
3. sunday market around metro Glória
4. view from the Palácio Gustavo Capanema
5. the Brazilian Press Association Building (ABI); architects Marcelo and Milton Roberto
6. outside the Palácio Gustavo Capanema; architects Lucio Costa, Oscar Niemeyer, and Affonso Reidy; influenced by Le Corbusier





4



5



6

A WORLD WITHOUT BOOKSTORES

WHAT CHANGING TECHNOLOGY MEANS FOR SUBURBIA'S SOCIAL SPACES

Graphics Editor
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Master of Science in Urban Planning, 2012

I was riding the uptown 1 train back to my apartment one night when I heard that my hometown bookstore was closing. On February 16, 2011 Borders Group declared bankruptcy and announced it would be closing 200 bookstores, including the one in Commack, NY, the Long Island town where I grew up.

Like many Long Island suburbs, Commack is a town of strip malls, parking lots, and single family houses sprawling as far as the eye can see. A latchkey teenager without a driver's license, I was often confined to the house until my parents came home. Sometimes I would take my bike out and do laps around the neighborhood. When this became tedious, I tried to bike to my friends' houses or the local movie theater, only to find that I was blocked by a highway at every turn.

“The sale of books may now take place online, but that's just one part of what bookstores do in a neighborhood.”

One day, pouring over satellite images on Google Earth, I made an incredible discovery: if I were to take a different late bus from school to a stop a few miles from home, walk a quarter mile across a condo complex, cross through a gap in the fence, and walk another quarter mile across a twelve-acre parking lot, I could reach the local Borders bookstore. Once there, it was only a half hour walk along several four-lane roads and across a highway on-ramp and an overpass to get home.

Admittedly, there was nothing special about this Borders. There was an identical one eleven miles away and a Barnes and Noble just up the road. There was nothing unique about its design or the books it carried either. It was a national chain, and I knew there were hundreds just like it across America, yet there was always something special to me about this bookstore. Here is where I had proudly spent my own

money for the first time. This was where I became an expert gift-wrapper at a holiday fundraiser, where I celebrated the midnight release of the final installment of the Harry Potter series — in full costume — and where I had been first been invited to hang out with the “cool kids”. Yes, this was my bookstore.

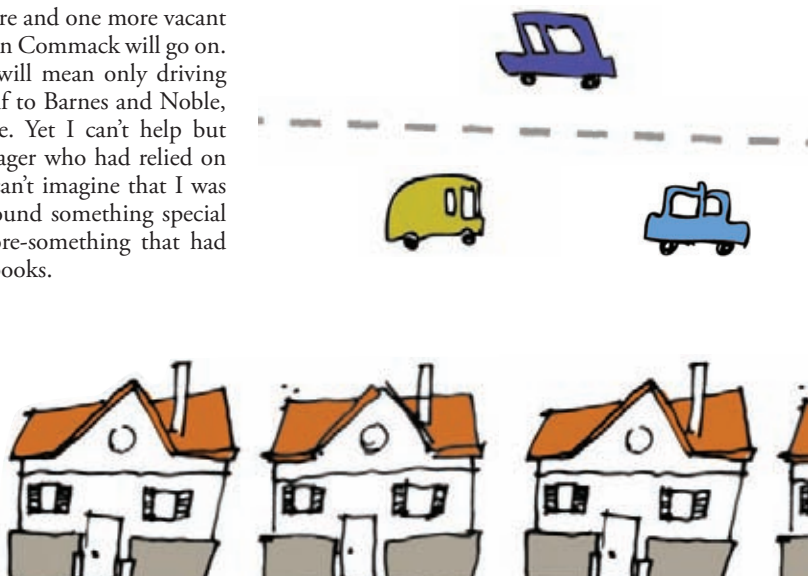
Soon enough, like every good suburbanite, I received my driver's license and eventually my own car and my visits to the bookstore slowly tapered off. Soon I was off to college, and eventually grad school. On a recent trip back home, I visited my bookstore to take advantage of its going-out-of-business sale, but more importantly, to say goodbye. Looking around the emptying shelves, I decided I wanted to make one last purchase, a souvenir to remember my bookstore and all that it had meant to me as a teenager. In the back I found it: a glorious hardcover history of New York City for \$35, marked down from \$40. Years ago, it was the kind of book I would have saved up for and carried home with pride. Instead, I grabbed my smart phone and found the same book on Amazon.com for \$16. With a heavy heart, I returned it to the shelf. No wonder the store was closing.

As I left for the last time, I wondered, in a world of online shopping, e-readers, and e-books, what use do we still have for bookstores? Essentially every place equipped with Wi-Fi is now an e-bookstore. Will bookstores even have a place in the future, or are they doomed to go the way of the drive-in theater, the soda shop, and the record store?

With one less chain store and one more vacant building, life in suburban Commack will go on. For most, this closing will mean only driving the extra mile and a half to Barnes and Noble, or just shopping online. Yet I can't help but remember being a teenager who had relied on this particular store. I can't imagine that I was the only person who found something special in this generic bookstore-something that had nothing to do with its books.

The sale of books may now take place online, but that's just one part of what bookstores do in a neighborhood. Even in this digital world, people still need bookstores because they fulfill needs beyond the sale of books — needs that technology can never fulfill. Bookstores are just one example of what urban sociologist Ray Oldenburg calls “third spaces:” places that are neither home nor work, but important social spaces that are accessible and inexpensive places to interact with others. Third spaces are informal centers of community life that foster social interaction and a sense of place. In the absence of accessible places in an isolated suburb, this bookstore fulfilled that need for me in a very poignant way.

Media reports tell of how the demise of the big box bookstores is currently allowing independent bookstores to flourish. However, the small independent bookstore tends to be an urban phenomenon. Cities, after all, have enough critical mass to support even the most obscure niche markets — where else can you still find typewriter repair shops? Even with some brick-and-mortar bookstores closing up shop, cities have no shortage of “third spaces.” But what happens after the bookstores close in the suburbs, where there are few local cafés and all the coffee shops are drive-throughs? I fear what a world without bookstores means for the suburbs, where a Borders on the other side of the highway might be all we have. U



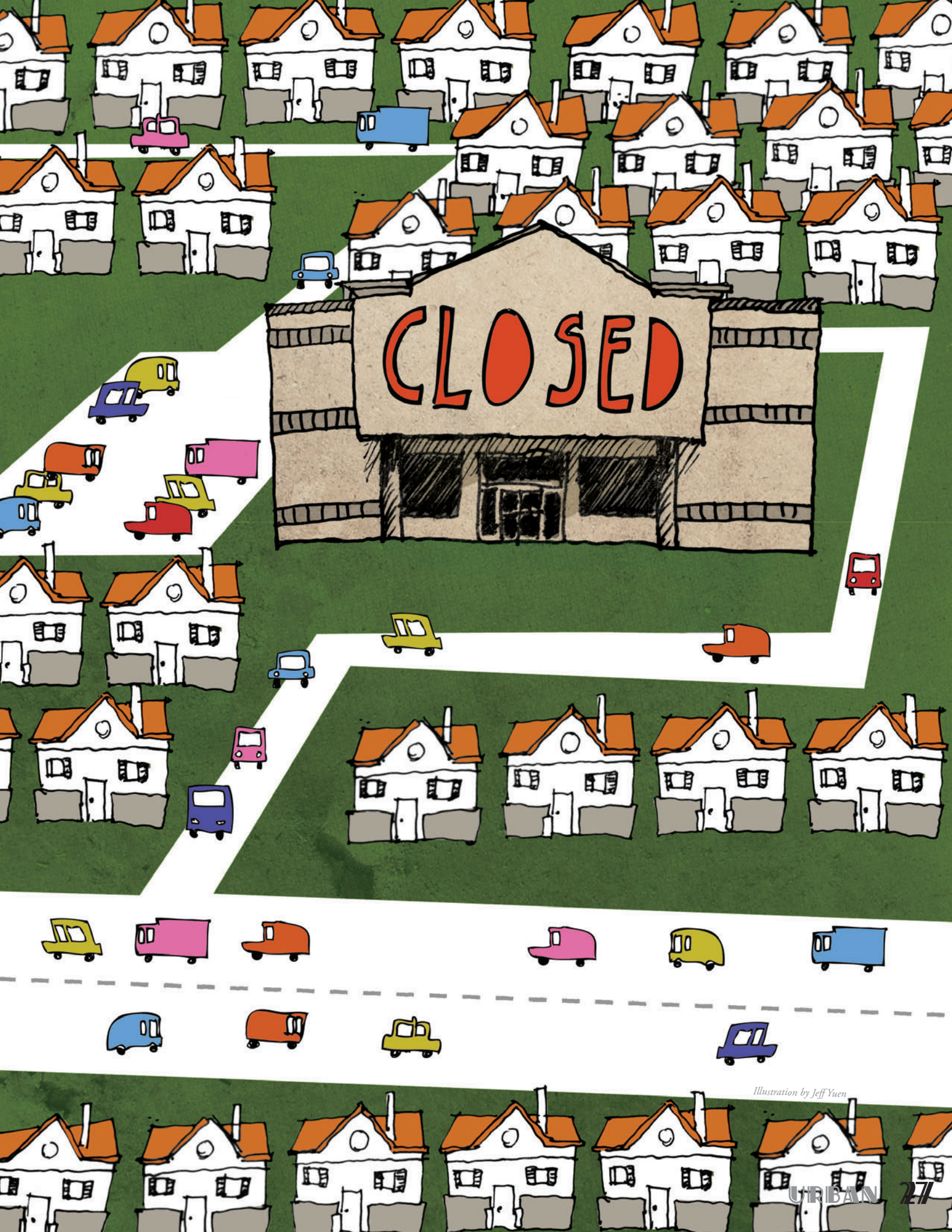


Illustration by Jeff Yuen

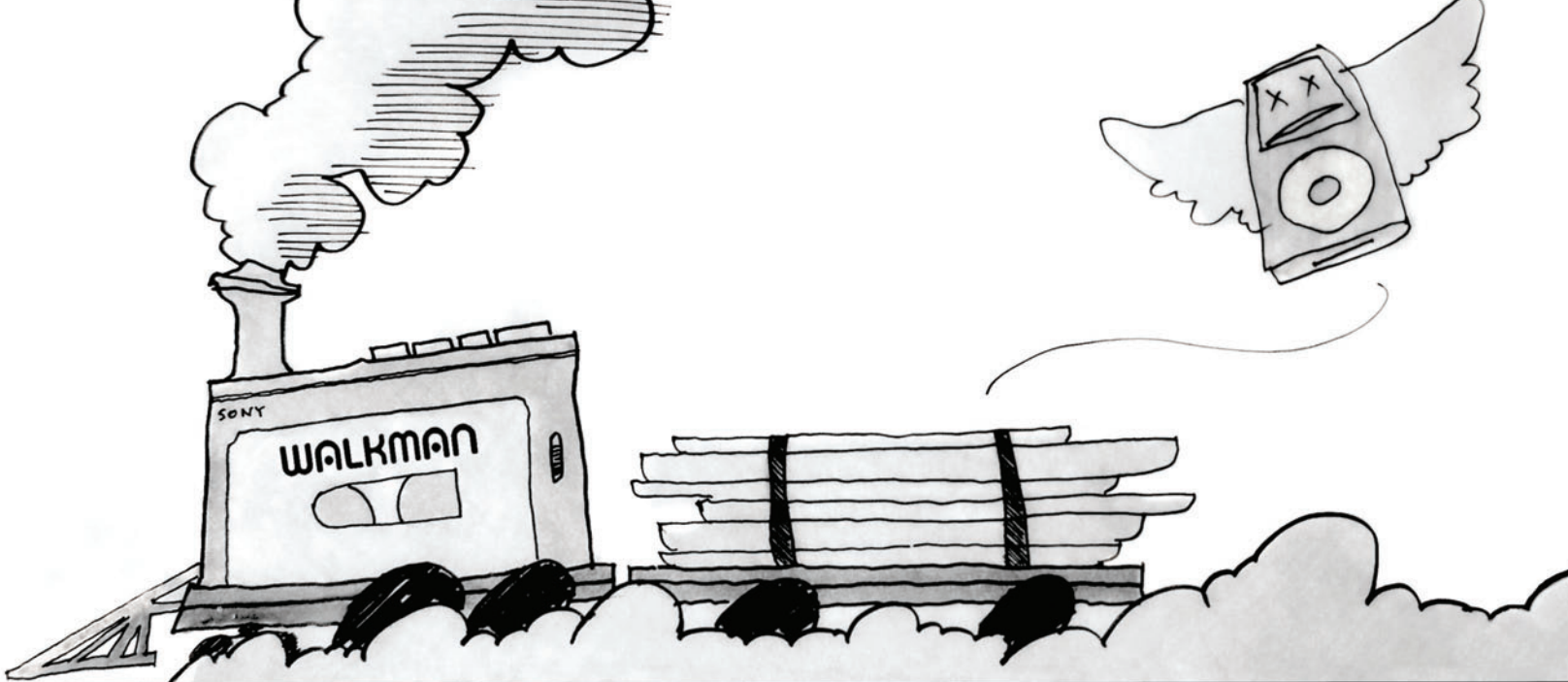


Illustration by Jeff Yuen

WALKMAN INFRASTRUCTURE

PUBLIC WORKS SHOULD BE BUILT TO LAST

Arvind Murthy

Master of Science in Urban Planning, 2012

Infrastructure needs to be resilient. Resiliency is not reinforced masonry or seismic retrofitting but versatility and the ability to adapt to the times. When users make existing infrastructure work for them in new ways, and vice versa, it is proof that the system has passed the test of time and is resilient.

With this in mind, Sony recently announced the discontinuation of its cassette Walkman. I received my first and only Walkman, a cassette model, as a gift in 1992. I still occasionally use it, and it seems that the two AA batteries in the unit have been there since the time when 56k was 'blazing fast'. My Walkman still feels just as good as it did in my formative teenage years. I want, so dearly, to be able to say the same for my iPod Photo or iPod Nano or iPod Classic or iPod Touch, but I can't.

As much as I want to like their sleekness and speed, they are not nearly robust enough to produce real lasting memories. Why does it seem that today's solutions just don't measure up to the gear of yesteryear? Is it fair to compare the two? They can each play music, be paused and rewound. I know an iPod can do so much more than play music - but why?

We want infrastructure facilities that are everything to everyone, we want them now and we want them cheap. Oh, and we want them to be completed yesterday from funds that will be paid back tomorrow. It seems that everything today is multi-this and multi-that. No planning student today can ignore the arguments in favor of 'Swiss Army Knife' infrastructure to the point where we are trapped in a multi-modal, multi-use, multi-purpose trinity that defines what a progressive planner should strive towards.

Yet applying the iPod mindset to infrastructure would be dastardly unsustainable. Maybe instead of making everything for everyone, we should be focusing more on the basics and just make structures that will last throughout this century. No refreshes, no updates, no upgrades - just a quality piece of infrastructure that does what it does and that's it, because anybody who has ever tried playing Angry Birds as they stream Pandora while their calendar syncs can tell you: the iPhone will freeze, and then you'll be back to square one.

Meanwhile, I'm still listening to my Walkman. 

[illegible]

TECHIES AND TRANSIT GEEKS COLLIDE TO TALK TRANSPORTATION

Georgia Bullen, Peter Jenkins & Kris Ongoco

MSUP 2010

MSUP/MIA 2012

MSUP.2010



Photo from Streetsblog

Transportation Camp East, New York City

During March 2011, OpenPlans, a nonprofit who focuses on open government and livable streets, held “unconferences” in New York City and San Francisco. Dubbed Transportation Camp, the event aimed to unite transit geeks from the government and technology worlds with other transit lovers to discuss the issues facing transportation today and how technology can help.

This cross-continental affair is particularly interesting because of the “unconference” format where there is no set agenda, just session times. Session topics are proposed during the unconference and then selected by participants. This means that if you want to have a session and you want people there, you need to communicate your idea, campaign for it, and maybe convince your friends to help you out.

While new to much of the government crowd, unconferences are familiar affairs for techies who thrive on the creativity and new ideas spawned by such open dialogue. On the other

hand, many of the techies were new to the challenges of urban transit, bringing everyone to an equally uncertain playing field.

San Francisco and New York provided an interesting contrast with respect to the topics that dominated the conversations over the two weekends. In San Francisco, topics focused on public-private partnerships, real-time data, open apps and persuasive technology, with the underlying question being how can transit agencies make transit sexy?

The conversations in NYC were not that different. Unlike San Francisco, where a good number of residents still depend on the car to get around the Bay Area, common themes related more to the role of transportation and technology in urban environments. Topics ranged from cab sharing apps, data visualization, open data and behavior change to human scale design. Questions like who does it serve, and who should it serve, with sessions provocatively titled “Rosa Parks, is there an app

for that?" demonstrated the different emphasis of the New York unconference.

The discussion also moved back and forth between US and developing country cities, and the digital divide around the globe and within minority and low-income communities in the US. While technology has done a lot to democratize the planning and political process, there was consensus on the need to make technology more accessible to underserved communities, and a general sense of optimism that smart phones, apps, SMS communications and other new technologies can help to address social inequality.

In both cities, technical conversations like one about General Transit Feed Specifications (GTFS), a data format that enables you to get transit schedules and routing via Google Maps, centered around the lack of standardization. Agencies often have to wait up to six months to one year to hear back from Google to know if their feed has been accepted. Open data formats are illuminating the need for better collaboration between agencies, such as in locations where multiple agencies manage transit stops the long lag times can complicate coordination across the agencies.

It was inspiring to see the amount of people interested and working on innovative ideas to identify and solve transit needs with technology. Both events were at capacity with 300 people each, including attendees from as far as Amsterdam, Paris and Zurich, demonstrating the wide reach of the topic and its great potential for transportation innovation. U

Plan Q-60

Woodside, Queens: An air rights development proposal for corridor Q-60 that helps to advance the goals of PlaNYC



New York City is growing, its infrastructure is aging, and its climate is changing. These are the challenges that the city's strategic plan, PlaNYC, endeavors to tackle. If the city is to succeed, it will need innovative thinking towards redevelopment, new development, livability, and sustainability.

In order to realize the city's full growth and land use potential, PlaNYC is exploring opportunities to deck over transportation infrastructure. Using this deviceful idea, Plan Q-60 investigates how to best pursue a decking project for corridor Q-60, a three parcel, 2.7 acre rail cut over the Long Island Rail Road (LIRR) in Woodside, Queens.

Methodology

A mixed method investigation was conducted in order to obtain a well rounded understanding of both qualitative and quantitative site characteristics. Non-probability sampling and informal interviews were used to gather local knowledge of neighborhood amenities and needs. An inventory was performed in order to assess how features of the built environment shape everyday life in terms of physical activity and pedestrian movement. A geographic information system (GIS) was implemented to survey land uses and acquire general demographic data including median age, average household size, income, and public transportation usage. Lastly, location quotients and twenty year population projections were calculated using Census 2000 data.

Findings

Woodside is quite literally surrounded by transportation, including the No. 7 subway, LIRR, Queens Boulevard, and the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway. These pieces of highway and rail infrastructure disrupt physical connectivity and sever social connections between communities. Issues of physical and social connectivity are heightened by the neighborhood's dearth of public space, as there are no existing civic centers, outdoor recreation courts or green spaces for people to gather. Over the next twenty years these problems will only intensify, as Woodside's population is expected to grow 40%, absorbing over 7,900 new residents.

Proposal

1. Connect the neighborhood physically and socially through dedicated public spaces (parks, civic center, sports facilities) on top of the LIRR
2. Build housing that is oriented towards public transportation and public space
3. Zoning change to facilitate increased FAR and greater density of mixed-use developments within .5 miles of public transportation and public space

This proposal is a practical way to achieve the shared objectives of the Woodside community and PlaNYC as it addresses existing needs while planning for the community's future. U



Corridor Q-60 Vision



REFRESHING THE 125TH STREET METRO-NORTH STATION IN EAST HARLEM

Diana Switaj

Master of Science in Urban Planning, 2012

People all over the world recognize the name “Grand Central Station”, but few have heard of its sister station at 125th Street and Park Avenue in East Harlem. Over the course of the semester, I visited the station several times as part of my work studying transportation in East Harlem for my Spring studio. It was not difficult to identify a multitude of problems.

At 96th Street, the Metro-North commuter railroad emerges out from underground and runs northward along Park Avenue on an elevated structure through East Harlem until it disappears into the Bronx. The 125th Street Station sits tucked under the elevated rail structure in the middle of Park Avenue on 125th Street, largely surrounded by vacant land and abandoned structures. The space outside of the station is dark and unwelcoming. Signage at the station points to nearby subway stops, but gives commuters no sense of where they are relative to the rest of New York City and fails to provide information on local amenities and attractions in East Harlem. Finally, there is only one small bike rack at the station that was repeatedly observed to be misused while bicycles were seen chained to nearby fences and lamp posts.

These factors contribute to why Community Board 11 of East Harlem has expressed that Metro-North commuters are hesitant to transfer to local public transit at the Station. Manhattan Borough Commissioner of Transportation Margaret Forgione has echoed these concerns, stating that the Department of Transportation has identified the station as a problem area.

Simple design improvements could remedy many of these problems, enhancing commuters’ experiences of the station and possibly improving connectivity to the rest of New York City’s transit system by making it more of an inter-modal hub.

LIGHTING

According to Commissioner Forgione, lighting under the viaduct and at the Metro-North station meets the City’s minimum requirements. Despite this fact, the area surrounding the station remains dark and shadowy, especially at night. This contributes to an atmosphere that travelers perceive to be unsafe. Improved lighting at the station, and especially at exits, could improve safety and make commuters more willing to connect to local transit.

SIGNAGE

Better signage at the station could also promote connectivity and enhance commuter experience. Instead of simply pointing travelers towards the 4, 5 and 6 train subway stops on Lexington Avenue one block to the East, new signage could provide additional travel information that includes the nearby 2 and 3 train subway stops as well as bus lines. Furthermore, new wayfinding signage could provide information on the rich culture and history of East Harlem as well as locations of nearby attractions like The Museum of the City of New York, Museo del Barrio, and the National Black Theatre.

BICYCLE AMENITIES

Better bicycle parking should be provided at the station to accommodate existing demands, encourage the “bike-and-ride” transportation culture currently being promoted by the DOT, and to help make the 125th Street Metro-North station an inter-modal hub. There is room for these new bike racks in the empty space under the stairs descending from the train platform, directly across from the entrance. Special signage should also be considered to warn drivers of cyclists passing through due to poor visibility in the area caused by the visually obstructive viaduct.

These urban design elements combined with additional features like news stands and public art could greatly improve the space. By enhancing the commuter experience of the 125th Street Metro-North station, the station could become an intermodal hub that seamlessly connects regional transit to the many other ways of getting around New York City.



Contact **URBAN**

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