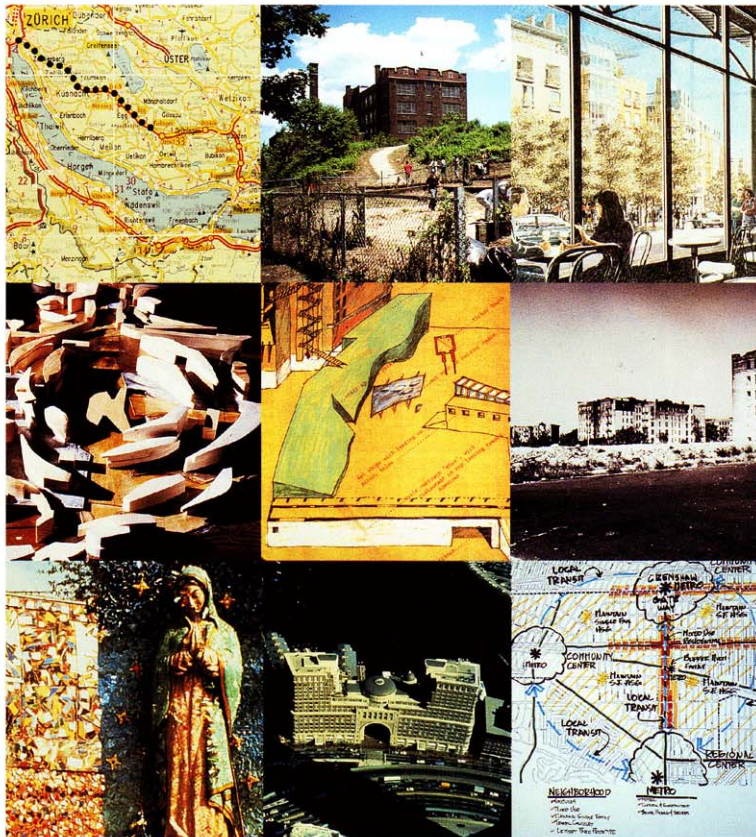


Urban Revisions

Current Projects for the Public Realm

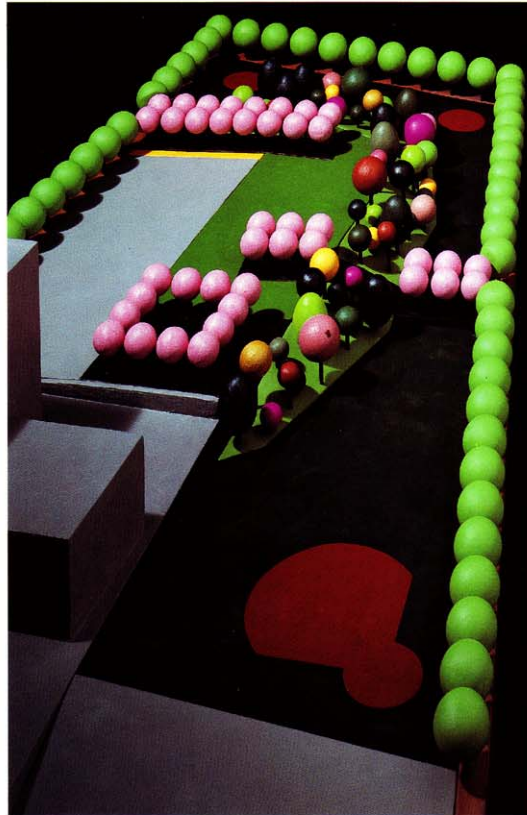
■ May 15 – July 24, 1994
The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles



unbuilt "STEEL CLOUD": *West Coast Gateway, Los Angeles* seeks to give form to a variety of conflicting facts and identities surrounding the project's unusual site in the airspace over a major downtown freeway.

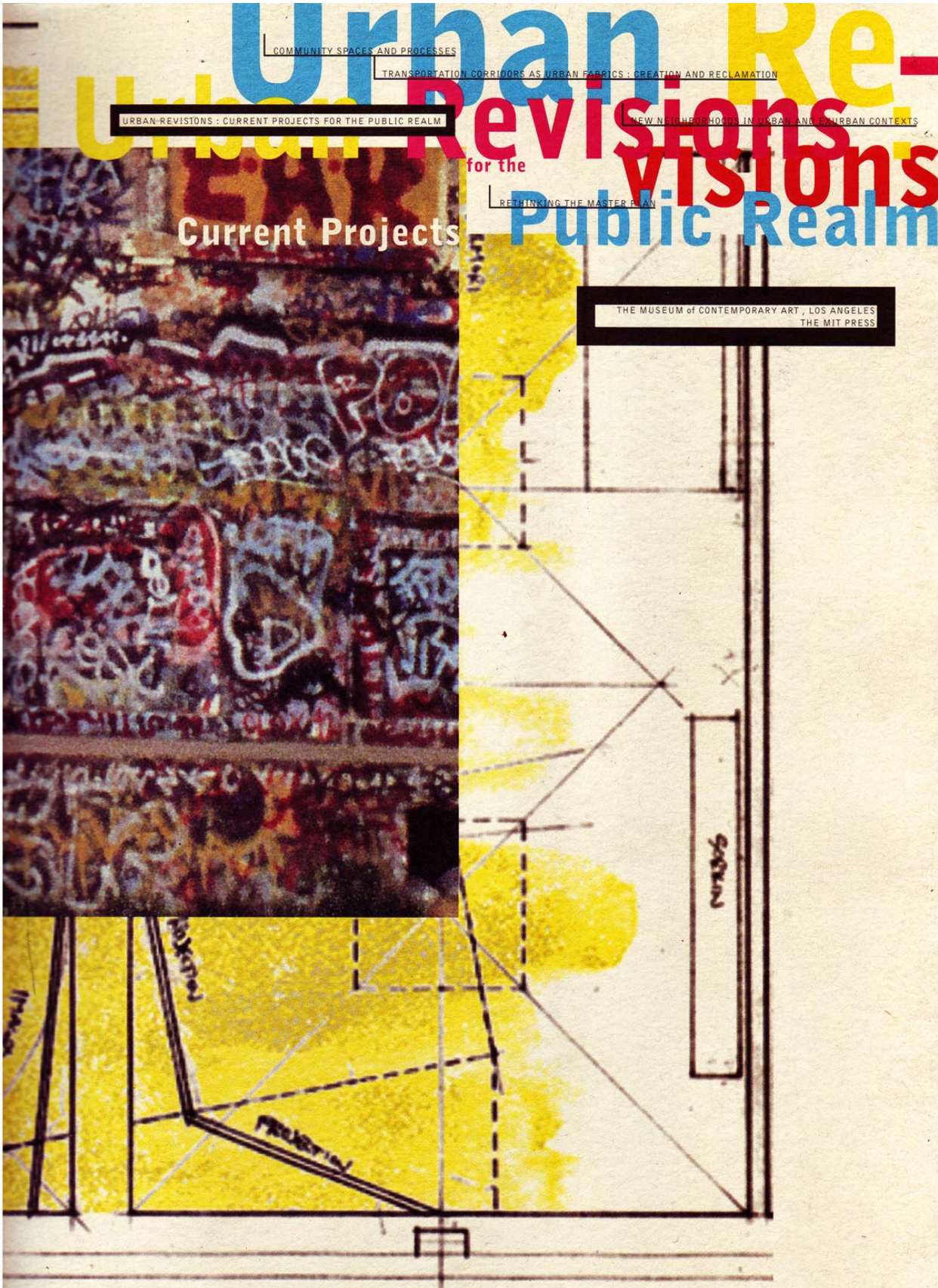
At the level of the city block, the exhibition presents two projects for urban gardens in the Bronx, New York, and Watts, Los Angeles. The structure of *Territorial Imperative: Master Plan for Bathgate Avenue Community Park, Bronx, New York*, planned by Baratloo-Balch Architects, represents an almost

defensive strategy in its layering of zones of usage in response to surrounding conditions and the needs and preferences of its users. Achva Benzinberg Stein/BLS Environmental Planning and Design's *Uhuru Garden, Watts, Los Angeles* envisions a site for productive agriculture with programs connected to existing institutions in the city as an alternative to undifferentiated open space.



Far left: Community meeting and formation of the Comité Nos Quedamos/ We Stay Committee, Bronx Center, New York

Scale model depicting zones for Territorial Imperative: Master Plan for Bathgate Avenue Community Park, Bronx, New York, Baratloo-Balch Architects



COMMUNITY SPACES AND PROCESSES

TRANSPORTATION CORRIDORS AS URBAN FABRICS: CREATION AND RECLAMATION

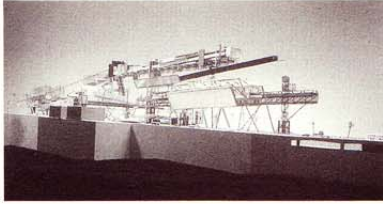
URBAN-REVISIONS: CURRENT PROJECTS FOR THE PUBLIC REALM

NEW NEIGHBORHOODS IN URBAN AND SUBURBAN CONTEXTS

RETHINKING THE MASTER PLAN

Current Projects

THE MUSEUM of CONTEMPORARY ART, LOS ANGELES
THE MIT PRESS



Rashid + Couture / ASYMPTOTE. "Steel Cloud": West Coast Gateway, Los Angeles. Scale model.

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Baratloo-Balch, Architects. Master Plan for Bathgate Avenue Community Park. Bronx, New York.

In 1988 an international competition was held for the design of a monument to immigration to be erected in the airspace over a downtown Los Angeles freeway. The competition's winners, architects Hani Rashid and Lise Anne Couture, proposed a design giving form not only to the idea of immigration as laid out in the competition brief (to include various structures and spaces about immigration, the Pacific Rim, etc., oriented to both adults and children) but also seeking to express architecturally the character of late twentieth-century life. Dubbed the "Steel Cloud," their design for the West Coast Gateway encompassed a range of structures, functions, and technologies meant to portray the intangible forces of movement, flux, change, and regeneration within a kind of large-scale, urbanistic armature intended as the opposite of a traditional static monument. The innovation of this fluid, complex, and challenging urban design lies in the nature of its response to the parameters of a master plan. It seeks to recast an urban "dead zone" not only into an active district for the arts and recreation but also into a symbolic "framework" for current and future cultural, social, and technological conditions and endeavors. While the design will remain unbuilt due to fundraising problems as well as the controversy that surrounded its unconventional appearance, it represents a serious attempt to reconsider the nature of the monument at the end of the twentieth century and brilliantly expresses in non-narrative form the forces pervasive in our society and in the city.

THE BLOCK—REENVISIONING OPEN SPACE

Two current projects stand out from among the many efforts being undertaken in American cities to reclaim open space for productive and congenial neighborhood-oriented usages. At the level of the city block, otherwise derelict and underused open spaces are being reconfigured for purposes specific to the needs of their surrounding communities instead of being dedicated to generalized, non-specific recreational activity. The Uhuru Garden project in the Watts section of Los Angeles is perhaps the foremost current example of experimentation in the area of purposeful structuring of open space. Designed by landscape architect Achva Benzinberg Stein, Uhuru Garden will replace an empty block with productive agriculture, facilities for instruction in its production, irrigation, etc., and for its distribution and sale. Usage will be limited to those who wish to participate in, maintain, or take instruction in any aspect of work associated with the site, including residents of the adjacent public housing project, students at the nearby public school, and members of a local drug rehabilitation project engaged in the production and sale of goods as therapeutic and job-training activity. The design incorporates native California vegetation, examples of indigenous irrigation techniques, and other physical elements that will reinforce its role as a focal point in the community it will serve.

In New York City's South Bronx, the Bathgate Avenue Community Park is another example of open space being reclaimed for use by a wide cross section of individuals who live, work, and study nearby. Currently considered dangerous because of criminal activity, and thus off-limits to all but an intrepid few, the park is being redesigned by architects Mojdeh Baratloo and Clifton Balch to better serve the needs of its neighborhood. As in the Uhuru Garden project, a highly structured plan zoned according to specific activity and usage replaces the principle of undifferentiated open space. While the site is small, it offers a varying topography that accommodates such unrelated functions as gardening, ballplaying, supervised playgrounds for small children, etc.

These are being strictly delimited by the designers and positioned for maximum safety and visibility throughout the park. Its situation within the neighborhood itself is being subtly yet firmly reinforced by an "urban zone" of street trees and perimeter fencing around its periphery, acting as a buffer from the street without rigidly or harshly effecting physical separation.

COMMUNITY SPACES AND PROCESSES



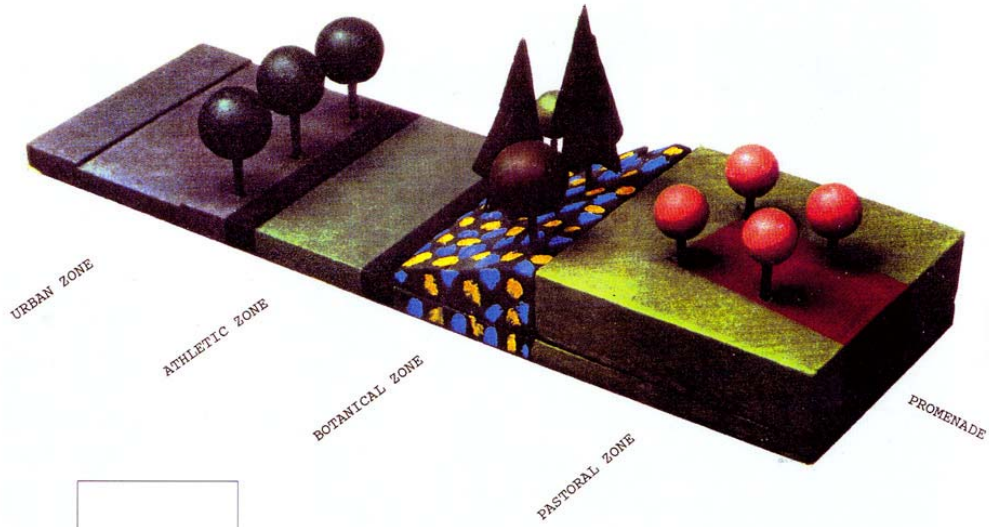
Neighborhood Plan Workshops, Los Angeles.

A significant degree of community input and involvement has informed the genesis and development of the projects discussed above. Instead of applying unilateral bureaucratic decisions and extravagant and/or unmediated architectural visions, these projects attempt seriously to answer to the needs and desires of those with a stake in their future. This phenomenon represents a substantial shift away from previous generations' imposition of urban plans and designs onto a city or district with little or no interaction with the inhabitants and users of a given site. It has now become commonplace for public and private interests to seek community involvement and support from the outset of a project, in part because of the numerous instances where community groups have succeeded in derailing or causing major changes to projects after the fact. By the same token, architects and urban planners have, of necessity, become increasingly cognizant of and responsive to such articulated needs and desires in their vision of the shaping of the public realm. Indeed, the interaction between the design professional and the untrained, yet committed, layperson is a crucial component of the successful outcome of today's work in urban planning and design. As stated by veteran urban planner Denise Scott Brown,

Urban design requires thoughtful, knowledgeable and able designers, who can intervene in the urban processes in a supportive and understanding way and who will know when, in their given role, it is appropriate to design, and when it is more creative not to.¹⁹

The Bronx Center project, discussed above, stands as perhaps the foremost example of community-based planning to date in terms of the role being played in the decision-making process by those who live and work in the area. It represents the pinnacle of a movement that first manifested itself in the anti-establishment climate of the 1960s toward the involvement of grassroots community groups and residents of the inner cities in local planning and design efforts. Numerous related projects, although on a smaller scale than Bronx Center, are presently underway around the country. In Los Angeles, following the civil disturbances of spring 1992, several significant neighborhood-based planning efforts came into being as a way for residents of underserved areas to gain a greater stake in the sustainment and improvement of their immediate districts. The process of evaluation, interaction, and recommendation undertaken by laypersons who chose to become involved in these efforts alongside trained professionals has resulted in improved knowledge of the public process and the social fabric that, if implemented, will profoundly impact the future of these areas. If progress in the physical and social realms is to be achieved, the public and private sectors and the design community will need to give increasing recognition to the importance of these efforts and continue the interactive processes whereby alliances are formed, understanding is gained, and truly public places are made.

¹⁹ Denise Scott Brown, "The Public Realm: The Public Interest and The Public Interest in Urban Design," in Andreas Papadakis, ed., *Denise Scott Brown: Urban Concepts* (London: Academy Editions, and New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), p. 29.



TERRITORIAL IMPERATIVE: MASTER PLAN for BATHGATE AVENUE COMMUNITY PARK, BRONX, NEW YORK



Sectional model and site plan.