

vacant parcels of land, historic structures in need of retrofit and preservation, tax breaks for new development, are all contributing factors. Simultaneously, one observes on the north end of Atlanta unmitigated suburban development, unprecedented sprawl and paralyzing vehicular congestion. The equation is quite simple: Midtown is situated to become a viable model for urban redevelopment, placing its inhabitants in close proximity to their occupations, cultural and political institutions, restaurants and retail establishments.

Our assessment of Midtown and working methodology includes the following:

1. Site specific examinations of the political instruments in place, i.e. zoning ordinances, planning regulations and municipal tax structures, in order to come to know the forces that inscribe the limits of development in Midtown. Over time, these policies have arguably contributed to the demise of this once viable, central, urban environment.
2. Investigating the dynamic between predominant market forces and an evolving master plan in the cultural center of Atlanta. To identify the strengths and weaknesses of the new master plan - the 'Blueprint Midtown'. While the community has played a role in the development of the master plan, the primary audience of the Blueprint is private development. Special Public Interest (SPI) and Community Improvement Districts (CID) are to date the most promising components to evolve out of this reevaluation.
3. Attempts at alternate readings of Midtown, against that of familiar models that introduce suburban settlement patterns into the existing urban framework, promoting vehicular oriented planning which further decimates an already debilitated urban texture. Also, to challenge some of the assumptions poorly elucidated in the Blueprint regarding land use and density, and expand the framework to include the peripheral conditions of the district as and imperative to reintegrating Midtown into adjacent neighborhoods.
4. Illustrate through case studies, architectural and urban design, projects which might contribute to the economic, social and cultural viability of one of Atlanta's most promising urban environments.

What role does design research play in this current milieu? How might developers be redirected towards a larger understanding of urban redevelopment and diverse programmatic necessity? What role can architects and planners play in the development of planning and zoning documents, or the establishment of legislation regarding social and aesthetic policies?

SOME FORCES AT WORK IN THE DISTRICT

Originally planned and constructed at the turn of the century, Midtown is today home to a wide variety of Atlanta's culture and com-

merce - NationsBank, IBM, First Union, the Fox Theater, the Woodruff Arts Center, the High Museum, Piedmont Park, and MARTA. Though these buildings and places bring a number of people into the area, there is to date no significant urban density. What exist now, though changing rapidly, is series of nodes of activity concentrated around major thoroughfares and MARTA stations. But the neighborhood has a great system of streets and sidewalks, and is waiting intelligent retrofit and reprogramming of many of its parcels.

As an extension of the Midtown Alliance, formed in 1978, an organization called *Blueprint Midtown*¹ was created in 1993 to oversee Midtown's impending redevelopment.² With the help of Consultant/Urban Planner Anton Nelessen's patented survey method, called the Visual Preference Survey™, the Midtown Alliance "actively pursued the opinions and ideas of all sectors of our community through a visual survey, a questionnaire, a workshop, and a series of follow-up review sessions."³ As described through their website — *The purpose of the Blueprint is to stimulate new development, to provide direction for public improvements, and enhance the pedestrian environment.*

Another function of *Blueprint* is to assist developers in navigating the process of land acquisition and planning with the City of Atlanta. To accomplish this the *Blueprint* created a database of information that allows developers to see what land is available for development, details the current zoning restrictions and outlines expected uses. The *Blueprint* promotes a formal review process before any project is submitted the City Planning Authority. These are just a few parts of the *Blueprint* that promote long term changes to the physical appearances of the neighborhood.

The Midtown Alliance is active in revising the zoning ordinances for the district. Most recently, Special Public Interest zones (SPI) have been outlined to promote localized development of retail and commercial activity centered on Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA) stations. Building type and use, parking, parking lots, and setbacks are some of the major elements covered in the SPI's for the Midtown district. While SPI's promote economic growth and diversity in districts, Community Improvement District (CID) allow money to be directed towards specific public improvement projects like water, public transportation, streets, parks and recreational facilities, storm water, sewage, and parking. A CID is a geographically defined district in which commercial property owners vote to impose a self tax, and then determine how those funds are spent in their given communities.⁴ The *Blueprint* is currently under Review by the City of Atlanta Zoning Board, and if approved, will become the Master Plan for redevelopment.

To date, the *Blueprint* is focused on raising money and satisfying investors, in essence concretizing the interface between property owners and development. At the vanguard of this new development is luxury housing, and in some respects this already jeopardizes the long term vision of the plan. A significant challenge is to develop a strategy which demonstrates to developers how investment in Public Spaces, neglected infrastructure and Parks can increase property value. As of this draft, this crucial dimension of

the master plan has yet to be developed, and as any Atlanta resident knows, the city no longer wants to be involved in the development or management of new parks or public spaces – the ultimate goal is privatization.

PROGRAMMING

In “From the Ground Up: Programming the Urban Site”, Andrea Kahn, makes the case for an approach to urban programming based on a close understanding of the site through ‘site construction’. Against traditional urban planning approaches which privilege the ‘veduto’ or aerial view of the city as a series of objective, homogenous interwoven enclaves, which “eliminate any hint of the I/eye”, multi-valent readings of site propose possible futures based upon a larger understanding of specific site forces. Conceiving of site as a compilation of urban narratives, both literal and fictive, might propose “stranger paths through the city”. Site construction, through the evaluation and invention of urban narratives “proffer expansive visions to include the [not] city- that resistant space that defies reductive classification, the mobile ground that refuses to be contained.”

A concern with context or site construction as outlined above is more often than not overshadowed by universal practices governed by mass communication and shapeless aggregations. Informed not by the body, but by highway infrastructure, service related terrains and voids in the urban infrastructure created by errant zoning and economic policy, such ‘atopic’ spaces are in need of reassessment. With regards to this conception of site and programming, Vittorio Gregotti writes in “Inside Architecture” about the phenomenon of Atopia~ the principles of settlement based on something other than the idea of place.

Perhaps the formal organization of these atypical typologies needs to be more radical. They do not seem to draw significant morphological materials from their own existence or from their own nature as celibate machines, or use their extraneous state as a dialectical element with regard to context. Certain products of modern engineering present poetic qualities based on their internal coherence and on a dialectic with their context. The most obvious defect is the inability to regulate vast open spaces that functionally accompany them and the inability to design such spaces so that they mediate with surroundings and with the land.

Atopicality, according to Gregotti, might be interpreted as a sign of an inevitable mechanism of international interdependence (cultural, political, economical) that has yet to find a significant spatial organization in architecture and takes the form of control and domination, against community attempts to secure traditions.

Through the specific sites examined: parking lots, brownfields, newly inscribed “special public interest’ and ‘community development’ zones, dysfunctional gaps in the city i.e. interstate viaducts and tunnels, we are searching for poetic qualities based on an internal and external coherence and a dialectic with their context.

The most obvious defect today with these sites is the inability to regulate the open spaces which functionally accompany them. We are investigating ways and means to comprehend and design such spaces so that they mediate with surroundings and with the land.

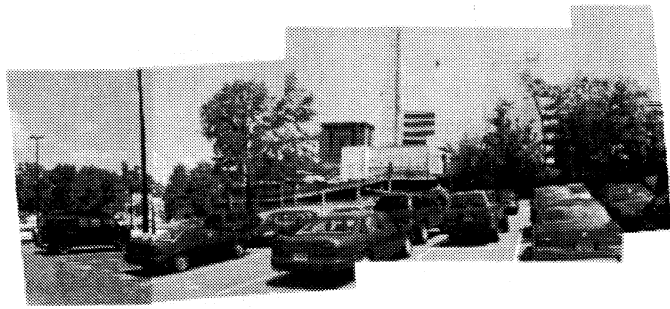
PROJECTS

The (Con) Temporary Film Institute

<http://www.gg-architects.com/driveinhome.html>

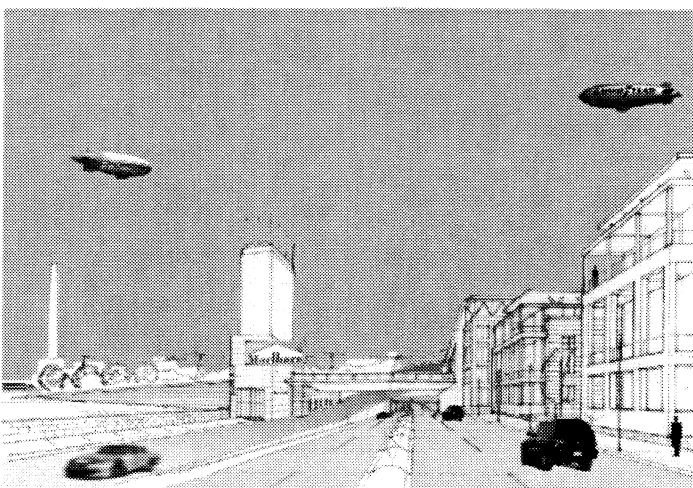


Public space is where the meaning and the unity of the social is negotiated. As ‘Public Spaces’ are slowly absorbed by privatization and the very definition of the ‘Social’ evolves, one must take stock of those spaces, public and private, which constitute a primary place of interaction. The parking lot, as many of us know, is the most frequently experienced urban space in Atlanta. As a component of a viable urban fabric, Richard Dagenhart states “Atlanta’s parking lots lead to nowhere.” During the day, the (Con)Temporary Film Institute operates as most other parking lots in the vicinity, accommodating the in and out of traffic. In the evening, when many of the adjacent lots have little to no occupancy, the CFI is busy, showing a double feature 7 nights a week outside and inside. Park your car, walk up and down Peachtree Street, come back, watch a film and visit with friends. Demand will be great for each of the 99 spaces in the lot. The outside seating and queuing area adjacent to the diner will be busy. The aluminum frame, based on the modular of simple scaffolding design, and lightweight skin contribute to the ephemeral nature of the project. Upon short notice, as new clients come forward with plans for permanent structures, the (Con)Temporary Film Institute can be disassembled and reconstructed elsewhere, at minimum cost and maximum reusability.



Another Atlantic Steel

<http://www.gg-architects.com/atlanticsteel.html>



The now defunct Atlantic Steel, America's largest brownfield reclamation project, is situated to become a model for urban redevelopment. Atlanta, haven to numerous large scale sporting facilities and the consummate auto congested contemporary city, provides the social, economic and political narrative for this proposal. From defensive driving classes, weekend NASCAR and Grand Prix

Events, large scale auto, etc. conventions, to sound affordable housing, workspace and shopping spaces, our design embraces the existing street and circulation patterns of the contemporary city. These new amenities are woven into a 1.9-mile racing loop. Multiple speeds and layers of movement overlap at numerous instances in the revitalized neighborhood. The infield of the development is open to vehicular, recreational and pedestrian circulation 24/7, while the track, the greatest 20th century sporting venue in the city, supports a variety of functions ingrained in the daily lives of Atlanta's 3 million inhabitants.

5th Street Bridge Plus

William Davis

<http://www.gg-architects.com/masters.html>

"With the conditions of the individual communities on either side of the Downtown Connector pushed to the edge that their programs will allow, a calculable space of 'inbetween' is created - a link. This project is concerned with how to engage this

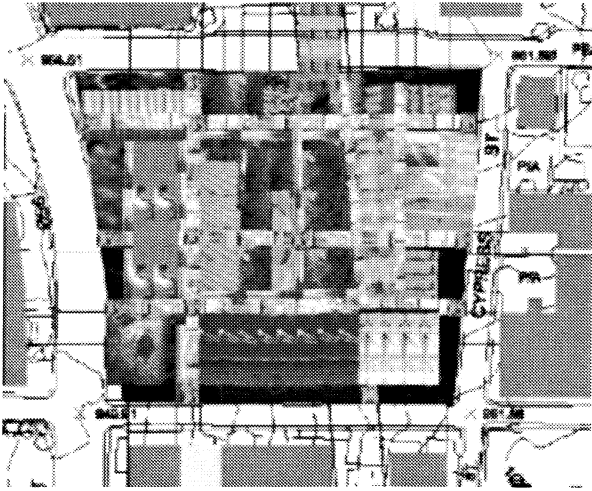


limited space of infrastructure that has to date been an overlooked void, invisible. A new bridge, which is an extension to Georgia Tech's center for Literature, Culture and Communication serves to enhance both districts as well as the greater urban community."

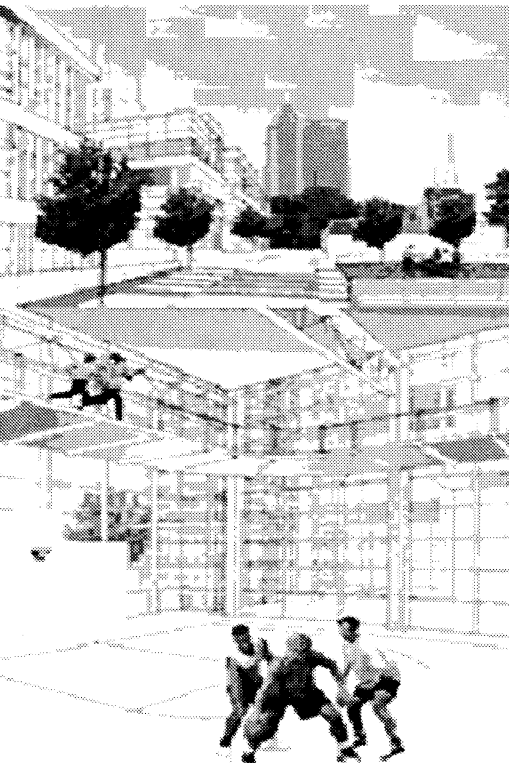
Public-Private Interface: A New Park And Community Center At The Midtown Marta Station

Kristen Brantley

<http://www.gg-architects.com/masters.html>



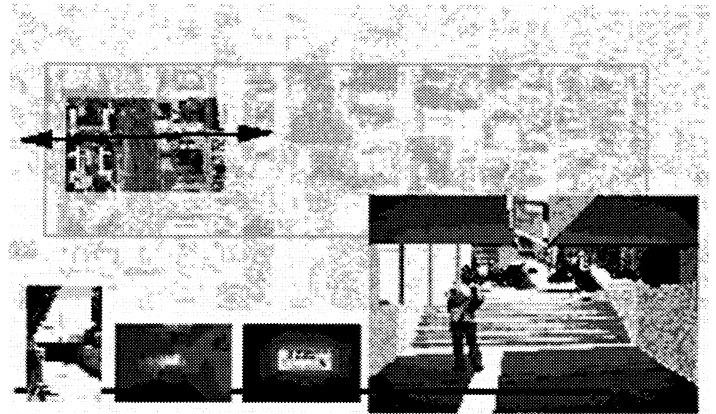
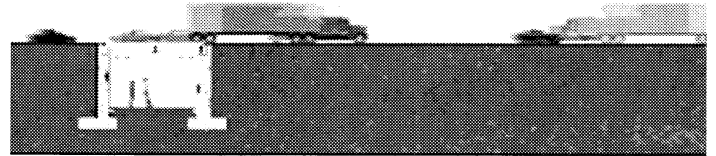
“The Midtown district is deficient in a variety of scaled open spaces. The Blueprint Midtown’s approach ‘public space and parks’ is to date ‘as yet defined’ and in this respect is lacking. The issue of vicinity to development nodes has been overlooked. This specific site belongs to a Special Program Interest Zone. This investigation, defined as a Public/Private initiative, seeks to outline ways in which Private Corporations can begin to collaborate with the city in order to enhance the public domain.”



Revealing Diverse Publics: A New Market And Plaza At The 3rd Street Tunnel –Michael Reiman

<http://www.gg-architects.com/masters.html>

“Intentions must be diverse in order to fill the needs and desires of a wide range of individual interests. This tunnel, for decades ignored and yet used daily by hundreds, leads this investiga-



tion towards a means to retrofit, overlap and intensify programs in inventive ways to create a social space. Inherent flexibility is imperative if this new space is to have lasting meaning within the ever changing landscape of the city.”

TOWARD A CONCLUSION

As we observe the dramatic reallocation of development resources toward Midtown and the efforts of public and quasi-public institutions to manage and condition this rapid growth it becomes clear that Midtown is in danger of being overwhelmed by the forces of privatization, exclusion and market oriented commodification. Without addressing the broader needs of the district, beyond luxury housing and restaurants, or investigating alternate solutions to some of these pressing problems, the forces of flexible late capitalist accumulation and standardization are poised to transform Midtown into a homogeneous landscape sanitized of the diversity which characterizes urban life.

Many of the proposals in this folio address specifically those civic and public institutions and patterns which have been slowly excluded or disintegrated from urban planning discourse, and in this sense, are aligned with the problem of memory, ethical/moral responsibility and life cycle. Understandably, these proposals have limits, however, new models must be revealed and investigated if

urban revitalization is to work to support the many functions and desires of the city.

The catalog of forms is endless: until every shape has found its city, new cities will continue to be born. When the forms exhaust their variety and come apart, the end of cities begins.

Italo Calvino

NOTES

¹Blueprint Midtown website: <http://www.blueprint-midtown.org>.

²<http://www.blueprint-midtown.org>.

³Ibid.

⁴<http://www.blueprint-midtown.org>.