Richard Sommer: dossier

2-4
Personal Statement

5-6
cover feature: Turning Full Circle: One Spadina Crescent, University of Toronto
Ken Greenberg, Canadian Architect, October 2017

7-10
public programming

New Circadia: adventures in mental spelunking
inaugural exhibition, Architecture and Design Gallery, Daniels Faculty 2019-20
Concept, Design and Curation in collaboration with Pillow Culture, NYC

11
Daniels Faculty, New Identity and Poster Series
  Collaborations, 2011-20
Bruce Mau Design (Identity) Catalogtree, MTWTH (Graphic Design)

12-14
Symposia and Conferences Organized
1995 – 2018

15-16
writing sample

“Time Incorporated: The Romantic Life of the Modern Monument”
Harvard Design Magazine, Number 9, 1999

17
representative design and exhibition projects 1990 – 2010

The Democratic Monument in America, 1900-2000
traveling exhibition

18
Olympic Games Cleft Auto Park: Georgia Dome
premiated competition entry: Olympics, Atlanta, Georgia

19
Neopolitan Plan for Hell’s Kitchen / Hudson Yards
commissioned study: HKNA & Storefront for Art and Architecture exhibition
Manhattan / West Side, New York

20
Plan for Mission Bay
commissioned study and exhibition: San Francisco, California
Personal Statement

The CV that accompanies this dossier provides an account of the different places, roles, and activities that led to my current role as Professor, and Dean of the Daniels Faculty of Architecture, Landscape, and Design at the University of Toronto. What my CV perhaps does not reveal is the diverse path I have taken in my development as a teacher, scholar, and designer. After completing my studies at the Rhode Island School of Design and Harvard GSD, my first ten years out of school were itinerant, moving between practice and teaching. When I started, I was trying to emulate the teacher-practitioners that had been my models and mentors, pursuing a practice with small projects, writing, competitions, and organizing symposia and exhibitions. During this time, I was focused on teaching as a means to develop ideas, and cultivate a community of students and peers. When I took my first teaching post at Iowa State, I had little or no knowledge of tenure, or understanding of the hierarchies and politics of colleges and universities. The roles I had at Iowa State, Columbia, Washington University, the California College of the Arts (as a scholar-in-residence) and the travelling I did under the Wheelwright Fellowship were critical to my development as a teacher, and to the formation of the program of research I have pursued as a scholar and designer. After my initial, itinerant years, the eleven years that followed at Harvard GSD were a period of focus and maturation. While at Harvard GSD, I also served as the O’Hare Chair in Design and Development and Visiting American Scholar at the University of Ulster (2005-10), where I worked with government agencies, academics, and other groups to develop proposals for the design of Northern Ireland’s cities and towns as they were emerging from “The Troubles.” It was during this period that I reconciled myself to the reality that not only by circumstance, but by choice, I had become more of a professor than a practitioner.

My teaching, research, writing, and creative work take the complex geography, culture, technology, politics, and historiography of the contemporary city as a starting point for pursuing a more synthetic, cosmopolitan architecture and urbanism. This work has evolved along two related lines, both concerned with the intersections between architecture, cities, and the politics of democracy. The first line, more applied and professionally oriented, reconceives urban design by strengthening the architect’s role in city-building in light of contradictory forces – on the one hand, increasing requirements for democratic representation and community participation in planning processes, and on the other, the retreat of public sector actors that has come with the growing dominance of private real-estate markets in the construction of the city. Much of my teaching and curricular reform at Harvard GSD, the applied research I conducted in Northern Ireland, and my current leadership of “SuperStudio” at UoFT (a collaborative studio in which all of our Architecture, Landscape and Urban Design Students share the same brief) revolves around the theme of developing design methods to better manage the competing constituencies at play in almost any significant urban project. The second line of my work is a long term, historically-focused research project, pursued, in-part, with collaborator Glenn Forley, examines the transformation of monument-making in societies aspiring towards democracy, with a particular focus on the American experience. Recently, this has led to a focus on the way architecture models time (‘deep,’ historical, and mediated, see: New Circadia)
As Dean of the Daniels Faculty of Architecture, Landscape and Design for the past decade, I have brought my experience to bear on all the above-mentioned fronts. Yet, to lead a needed transformation of the Daniels Faculty I had to grow and stretch my capacities much farther than I ever imagined. In the decade before my arrival, the Daniels Faculty had begun to take important steps to rebuild itself, after nearly being closed in the late-nineteen-eighties. Yet, as a school almost exclusively dedicated to professional design education, the Faculty was still considered an outlier in UofT’s science and humanities dominated culture. UofT is a large, public Research University with enrollments above 90K, and the Daniels Faculty was considered too small to survive under the revenue-centered budget model UofT began implementing almost 15 years ago. Against this background, almost immediately after arriving, I initiated major reforms. To survive and prosper at UofT, I saw that our school needed to expand beyond its mandate in professional architectural education and engage the larger structures of UofT by becoming a full-fledged University Division. While these reforms were partially motivated by concerns about the school’s size and financial resources, and the changing realities of public education in Canada (as everywhere), I never argued for the changes as a purely pragmatic matter, but rather, as an opportunity for our school to play a broader and more important role at UofT and in society at large. My proposal was that we should lead in making creative inquiry, design-thinking and visual literacy a new hallmark at the University of Toronto. Mobilizing talented colleagues, I built an inventive new undergraduate foundation in architectural and art/visual studies, renewed the school’s three graduate professional programs, created a unique, publicly-funded Ph.D. in Architecture, Landscape, and Design, and helped found various research initiatives, including the Global Cities Institute and the Green Roof Testing Laboratory. Adding art, curatorial work, environmental stewardship, and wood-based material science foci to our primary strengths in architecture, landscape and urbanism has broadened our disciplinary capacities and better connected us to both our Canadian context and issues of indigeneity. The Daniels Faculty’s rising reputation has rapidly increased student enrollment and more than doubled our faculty numbers, along the way increasing the number of women and other underrepresented groups among our faculty ranks at a higher rate than any other division at UofT. When I started, we had a graduate-only student population of 375. By adding other allied disciplines, and large, broad-based undergraduate programs with more than 1000 students, we are now among the largest schools in North America with architecture at their core. As part of this growth, we have expanded the Faculty’s public programming, drawing diverse constituencies into vital, interdisciplinary discussions about architecture, art, landscapes, and cities.
Perhaps my boldest achievement at UofT was imagining a site and building platform to serve the school’s expanded mission. Opened in 2017, the Daniels Building at One Spadina Crescent reinvigorated one of Toronto’s great civic landmarks, and is now catalyzing renewal at the western edge of the University’s main downtown campus. The building features Fabrication Facilities, Exhibition Galleries, a spectacular polychrome Main Hall, and light-filled Design Studios unique in North America today. Celebrated as “one of the best buildings in Canada of the past decade” by the Canada’s paper-of-record, the Globe and Mail, the Daniels Building at One Spadina has been widely published and received seventeen national and international design awards to-date. I count as one of my most important achievements as Dean that I was able to convince the University’s leadership and others in the city and surrounding communities that we had the vision and could garner the financial support to undertake this large and complex 95M dollar project. Working closely with a multi-disciplinary team led by Nader Tehrani and Katie Faulkner of NADAAA, I have fought harder to realize this project than perhaps anything else in my professional life. I have literally put my job and reputation at stake to make sure critical aspects of this project’s architecture and landscape would be achieved in way that would properly represent the school’s newfound prominence and expanded prospects for the future. The design and configuration of the Faculty’s new home embodies many of aspirations I have for the role that schools of architecture can play in the life of students, universities, cities, and the communities in which they sit. The Faculty just began its third year at One Spadina, and the building is helping to both transform the culture of the faculty, and the city that surrounds it.

As I prepare to complete my second term as a dean next year, and plan a return to my life as a professor, I have begun to reflect on the six schools where I have served, the diverse opportunities and circumstances they have presented, and my role within them. In each of these schools, I have sought to foster the kinds of creative environments and learning opportunities that would best serve students, my colleagues, and the broader communities at play. Becoming a dean has helped me to better realize, and develop, the skills and perspectives to orchestrate and promote the work of others. Along the way I have engaged thousands of students, and been a mentor to many individuals who have gone onto have prominent careers in academia, practice, and industry, some now with tenure, leading their own schools. As I have taken on increasing administrative and leadership roles over the course of my career, I have stayed engaged as a designer and scholar, and have never lost sight of the entrepreneurship and tenaciousness required to teach and undertake research in architecture and its allied disciplines. I understand the necessarily fragile nature of architecture within an institutional culture dedicated to research and creative inquiry through the making of things, and am deeply committed to it.
cover feature: Canadian Architect, 2017

Nader Tehrani & Richard Sommer

TURNING FULL CIRCLE

THE UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO’S NEW ARCHITECTURE SCHOOL TRANSFORMS A NEIGHBOURHOOD

Nader Tehrani Building

The University of Toronto

Photo: Utile

Design: Daniels Faculty of Architecture, Planning and Landscape

Architecture: Nader Tehrani Architecture

Turner Construction

Insatsu

© 2017 Nader Tehrani
Turning Full Circle, Canadian Architect, 2017

Established in 1965, University of Victoria’s architecture school—which I have always looked to as a symbol of the potential for design to be a powerful tool to build something new—has recently been reimagined. The school’s new home, designed by Mahaffy, Smailes, Dague, Jackson Architects, is located on the Vanier Campus, replacing an existing building that was outstripped by the growth of the university and the changing needs of its students.

The building’s design is rooted in its site, a former industrial building that was transformed into a modern architectural space. The architects worked closely with the university to ensure that the new building would be a reflection of the institution’s values and goals. The project was designed to be LEED Gold certified, with a focus on sustainability and energy efficiency.

The building’s design is characterized by its use of natural light, with large windows and skylights that allow for plenty of natural illumination. The interior spaces are open and airy, with ample room for collaboration and study. The building also features a green roof, which helps to reduce the building’s carbon footprint and improve its energy efficiency.

The new architecture school is a testament to the power of design to shape the future. It is a place where students can come together to learn, collaborate, and create. The building is a reflection of the institution’s commitment to providing its students with a world-class education in architecture and design. It is a space that is both functional and beautiful, and it is a symbol of the potential for design to shape the world for the better.
NEW CIRCADIA: adventures in mental spelunking
Architecture & Design Gallery
University of Toronto, 2019-20
concept / design / curation w/ Pillow Culture, NYC

Nathaniel Kleitman’s Mammoth Cave Experiment, 1938

Mammoth Cave

Spelunkers, New Circadia

Changing Area/ Spelunking Gear

New Circadia (adventures in mental spelunking) creates a metaphorical cave — a soft utopia — to inaugurate the Architecture & Design Gallery at the Daniels Faculty, University of Toronto. This immersive installation was inspired by Dr. Nathaniel Kleitman’s 1938 Mammoth Cave experiment (the first instance of a scientific research laboratory for studying natural human cycles of sleep and wakefulness). New Circadia engages the city, our students, and the entire University community in a variety of experiences — including happenings, multidisciplinary performances, dialogues, film screenings, and nocturnes — to probe and conjure notions of geological, mythical, mechanical, and biological time.

Circadian rhythm (Latin: circa, approximate and dies, day) describes any natural biological process that recurs on a 24-hour cycle. Thus, in the tradition of utopias, New Circadia, can be roughly translated as “New Day.”

Going Underground
To go underground is to suspend a sense of time, to exit the everyday world, and to evade authority. To descend into a cave is to return to a lithic past enhanced by mythical, cultural, and historical associations with underworlds, oracles, magic, ritual sanctuaries, and seclusion. New Circadia offers a paradisiacal retreat in the pursuit of circadian reverie.

Why New Circadia?
The biology that undergirds our well-being presumes being at rest during at least one-third of our lives. Nevertheless, the mechanization of life has evolved to an extent that we can be “plugged-in” at all hours. A central feature of this pursuit of an optimized state of productivity is a reciprocity between architecture and technology. The late-19th-century standardization of time that came with railroads and telegraphs; the 20th-century appearance of rail electrified cities; and the 21st-century primacy of the World-Wide-Web, which has enabled the spread of a globalized gig economy that crosses time zones — all are part of this temporal “architecture” of modernity.

Is it Time to Put Architecture to Sleep?
Architecture today is inextricably bound up in the urbanization of the planet. It needs to pay as much attention to marking time as it has historically devoted to manipulating space. And yet, the very culture of architecture has been built upon a fascination with adopting mindsets and accelerating technologies that facilitate long work hours and sleeplessness. How can architects counter the over-mechanization of everyday life? And how can architects convey the idea that idling — whether by sleeping, dreaming, napping, or meditating — is not lost, unproductive time, but rather an essential state of mind and body? By creating a dreamlike space where individuals and collectives can incubate states of rest, reflection, and reverie, New Circadia will test how architecture and landscapes can play a role in nurturing a greater interior life.
New Circadia: Felt “Mouth”

New Circadia: Lounge-Scape / Sound Works

New Circadia: Soft Spelunking Gear
New Identity & Posters

folded & wearable public programming materials: w/ Catalogtree, Arnhem / Berlin
new Daniels identity, logo and website, w/ Bruce Mau Design, Toronto
www.daniels.utoronto.ca
What is a School (of Architecture, Landscape, Art, and Urbanism), 2018
A new empirical urbanism has emerged over the past few generations, drawing tables of mind and methods of observation from the natural and social sciences, and making use of emerging forms of statistical and visual analysis. Such practices take observation, systematic documentation, and analysis of the city, as given, as a pre-assumption or even a designed intervention. For our purposes Empirical Urbanism is a framework for reimagining the association between architectural and urban theorizing and practices, as well as defining the requirements of urban theories and practices that, while other thought to represent opposing ideologies, are elements of an approach.

The symposium will interrogate this trend, asking how urbanism as an art and a set of practices may gain from it, especially, drawing the remembrance of the city that characterizes the past and present city, and how we go about prospecting alternate futures for it. Our title notwithstanding, we do not imagine an end to empirical urban research. Rather, this dimension of the design studio as a venue to explore and expand the arts of mapping and visual analysis, and offering new approaches to seeing and designing the city.
New Urban Paradigms: 
*Inquiries into the Master Planning of Mission Bay*, 1998

*Cities in the Making*, 1995

“The City’s Last Greenbelt” 
*San Francisco Examiner Magazine*, 1998
WHAT OPPORTUNITIES DOES monument-making offer for recasting the commemorative spaces of the contemporary landscape? Can monuments engender democratic spaces in a society whose building practices seem to reflect, on the one hand, the desire to express the free flow of matter and information, and, on the other, the overwhelming influence of the "value engineer"? I would like to respond to these questions by exploring, through a consideration of projects both built and unbuilt, new modes of monument making and reception—modes that areRomantic, temporary, and landscape-like. I will also explore how new forms of monument are struggling to embody critical and democratic values, often using ironic and allegorical tactics rejected by mainstream Modernism. But first I will examine how the Classical desire for permanence and the Romantic search for prescient forms of artistic expression persist in modern attempts at monumentality.

**ALLEGORICAL AND ICONIC MONUMENTS**

At the start of the 20th century, just before the Futurists' rejection of the monument, Adolf Loos dissected the nature of the modern monument. In "Architecture," Loos described architecture's function as the ability to "arouse sentiments," and argued that only certain kinds of architecture—the tomb and the monument—possessed the transcendent potential of "art," all else was utilitarian "building." In making this distinction, Loos seemed to be rearticulating a Classical schema in which architecture, with the monument as exemplar, is understood to be a symbol of humankind's ability to overcome the aleatory, destructive forces of nature. Yet Loos's association of the monument with Classicism was ambiguous. In the same essay, he does more than restate the monumental function of architecture with art; he also claims that "the work of art is revolutionary; the house is conservative"—that is, art can be challenging and forward-looking, but architecture must fulfill the more everyday need for comfort.

Following Loos's desire to elucidate the differences between things, one might distinguish between his categories tomb and monument. Like the religious relicary, the tomb possesses a special aura because we understand that it contains a real body or artifact; it thus effaces the "distance" of representation. This is what Loos was referring to in this seminal passage from "Architecture": "...if in a wood, we come across a tumulus, six feet long and three feet wide, shaped by the spade into a pyramid, we become serious and something in us says: someone is buried. This is Architecture." Because it does not contain the person or thing commemorated, the commemorating monument differs in essence from the tomb. Its power depends not upon the presence of the real body or artifact but instead upon the rhetorical force of a representational strategy—where no body exists, one must be metaphorically summoned.

Loos is at his most compelling when he explores the relationships and differences between material facts and conjured auras, between everyday practices and transcendent values. Despite the effort Loos made to identify culture as a dividing line between "art" and "life"—part of his insistence, in the words of the Viennese writer Karl Kraus, that we not mistake the "art" for the "chamber pot"—the greatest monument he designed was not a tomb or commemorative site but rather a skyscraper: his famous entry in the 1922 competition for a new headquarters for the Chicago Tribune, a high-rise in the form of a giant column.

Reviewing the text that accompanied Loos's design, Manfredo Tafuri, who had once described the project as "ironic" and indeed prophetic of Pop Art, revised his assessment and wrote, dismissively: "A single column extracted from the context of its order is not, strictly speaking, an allegory; rather, it is a phantasm. As the paradoxical specter of an order outside time, Loos's column is gigantically enlarged in a final effort to communicate an appeal to the perennial essence of values. Like the Giants of Kandinský's Der göttliche Klang, however, Loos's giant phantasm succeeds in signifying nothing more than its pathetic will to exist—pathetic, because it is declared in the face of the metropolis, in the face of the universe of change where values are clipped, the "aura" falls away, and the column and the desire to communicate absolutes become tragically outdated and absurd." Yet only an interpretation that narrows would fail to understand Loos's column as allegorical and ironic. The literary critic Paul de Man described, in his writing on Romanticism, how allegorical and ironic modes of expression create works that embody the modern subject's sense of alienation and difficulty in using language transparently. In this view, the allegorical work, by deploying historical forms within a new context, challenges—or, in de Man's terms, "evacuates" and "refuges"—longstanding traditions and received histories—in the case of the Loos's Tribune Column, the tradition and history of Neo-Romanticism as presented.

Allergy is allusive, pointing to (rather than embodying) its content. Irony either dissuades—precludes to be what it is not—or playfully multiplies the author's voice, depending for its effect upon the difference between what an author says and what an audience understands the author to mean. Articulating the unparalleled ability of irony to engage modern audiences, de Man writes that "it seems to be only in describing a mode of language which does not mean what it says that one can actually say what one means." Whatever Loos's intentions (he was, after all, a darling of the Dadaists), the radical shift in scale and function of what he called "The Big Greek Column" was taken by many as an ironic gesture, one that allegorized Sullivan's tripartite high-rise and playfully implied a link between the newspaper column and the Doric column.

A more recent work of monumental art picks up where Loos left off: Claes Oldenburg's 1968 Proposal for a Skyscraper for Michigan Avenue, Chicago, in the Form of Landau Taft's Sculpture "Death." Conceived after the artist had toured Europe's "great monuments," Oldenburg's project uses the idea of the monument to suggest a radical redefinition of an urban site. Referring to a tour of the recently-completed John Hancock Building with its architect, Bruce Graham of Skidmore Owings & Merrill, Oldenburg found something lacking in Graham's claim that the Hancock's tapering form was derived purely from the imperatives of structure and program.

Oldenburg, who had spent many of his early years in Chicago, was ambivalent about the Hancock. He liked the building but resented its scale and how it "followed him around," olditerating what he had come to view as the Chicago skyscraper: the Palmolive, later the Playboy, Tower. Then, during a visit to the
The quilt has challenged the view of AIDS as a pandemic whose victims are long ago from one nation or another and offers pictures of victims who have lived, for many, many statistics.

Time Incorporated, Harvard Design Magazine, 1999


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The quilt has challenged the view of AIDS as a pandemic whose victims are long ago from one nation or another and offers pictures of victims who have lived, for many, many statistics.
The Democratic Monument Exhibition explores the proposition that there is a new category of architectural objects that can be construed by situating concepts associated with the modern monument within the evolving political aspirations and practices of democracy in the United States. The exhibit is structured around a chronological survey of ten juxtaposed pairs of monuments representing each decade of the 20th century. Ostensibly dedicated to the themes of liberty, freedom, and equal representation—as opposed to the commemoration of war—each of the examples chosen has played a significant role in challenging the traditional conception of the monument through its symbolism, method of production, or means of reception. The exhibit's timeline, which contains approximately three hundred annotated images, maps and diagrams, locates the selected monuments in relation to political, artistic, and technological events of the past century. Two kinds of monuments have been chosen to represent each decade: Objects, often vertical in orientation and made of single or highly aggregated parts and Trails, horizontal in orientation and capable of rendering large swaths of the landscape with a singular theme or purpose.
THE CLEFT AUTO PARK
Georgia Dome Olympic Site, Atlanta, GA, 1996

Cleft Auto Park transforms an old railroad yard into a Tailgating Lot (above) and a Hip-Hop Grotto (below). Inspired by FreakNick (from: “to fraternize and have a picnic”), an annual car-centric event sponsored by historically black colleges in the Atlanta, GA area, the scheme was originally conceived as an ancillary event-site for the 1996 Olympics in Atlanta.

The project is a play on myths and rituals associated with the original Olympics, as follows:

The sacred character of ancient Olympia, site of the first Olympics, arose from its location in a geographic cleft. Over time, a continuous series of individual cults were superimposed on the site, one upon the other, and the actual location of the cleft was lost. This loss of origin coincided with Zeus’s assertion of absolute mastery over the sanctuary at Olympia. What had been a footrace, and fertility games — marriages between God and Earth, symbolizing the dominance of earth gods and their representation of agriculture, — were gradually transformed into games representing the militant and immortal Zeus. Thus, the introduction of “heavy” athletic events such as boxing and wrestling combined with pushing, strangling, and twisting, all of which were derived from earlier rituals involving blood sacrifice. Interestingly, artistic activities, especially music, dance and theater, often preceded the combat of naked bodies at other competition sites, but not at Olympia.

As with the lost cleft of ancient Olympia, our cities are characterized by activities which leave marks and then fade from view. Such is the nature of this site in Atlanta. Georgia: parked cars occupying a geographic scar left by a railroad yard. With this background in mind we conceived of a car park to accommodate a series of modern rituals that supplement spectator sports. These rituals are redolent of themes transfigured from ancient reveries associated with Olympia and the Olympics, here embedded in the cult of automobiles and tailgating. Thus the project synthesizes two aspects of the tail-gating tradition, jazzmen playing horns out the back of a car, here replaced by a “grotto” of electronic mix-masters piping sound up from below, and above, the imbibing of distilled spirits, the grilling of meats and hero worship, i.e. Beer, Hot Dogs and fanatic behavior.
NEOPOLITAN PLAN FOR HELL’S KITCHEN

Commissioned study, exhibition and publication. 1999-01
Storefront for Art and Architecture, New York, NY
w/Laura Miller, borfas/ B.U.

"Underdeveloped" according to powerful real-estate interests, Hell’s Kitchen (the extended area of what is now called “Hudson Yards”) should logically accommodate the expansion of Midtown Manhattan’s density. Yet bridges, ramps, and major access points associated with the Lincoln Tunnel, as well as the Fort Authority Bus Station, the Jacob Javits Convention Center, and rail yards form a barricade of “obnoxious” infrastructure, making the site resistant to laissez-faire development. Commissioned by The Hell’s Kitchen Neighborhood Association, the Neopolitan Plan projected an admixture of use, height and bulk zoning, quite literally figuring the overlapping political and socioeconomic interests vying for Hell’s Kitchen, one of the most contested urban sites in a major American metropolis in recent history. Going beyond project-based scenarios that respond primarily to one – or appease all – interests, agencies and constituencies, we invented design procedures to leverage one party’s interests against the holdings or interests of others. The former Javits mega-site is re-parceled – forming a new Neopolitan neighborhood, where housing, commercial uses, community programs, and open spaces hopscotch across the site strategically, serving the interests of local constituencies. Ultimately, the Neopolitan Plan for Hell’s Kitchen is less a "plan" than a design-based vehicle for private interest to become the subject of public debate and negotiation.
The project's overarching aim was to show how the various forms of commercial growth that have been considered for this site could be accommodated in a way that allows public interests to be better served by private development. This was achieved in two ways: one having to do with the form of the project, the other with its representation. The project situates proposed forms of Development, including a mixed-use research campus, housing & commercial development in such a way as to link profit with both a functioning and symbolic remediation of a large swath of the site's toxic ground (see the "Garden Girdle"). The project also proposes a much broader range of building and landscape conditions than were typically considered in San Francisco at the time--each linked to the highly differentiated programmatic needs and physical characteristics found at the center, edges and infrastructural extensions of the site. For example, the plan accommodates a range of densities, so that the pastoral predilections of the urban dweller (influenced by the spirit of American suburbia) and the need for some ecological restitution are addressed by building both a "Times Square" and a space for "Fresh Air."