Public.
A NOTE FROM THE EDITORS

What does it mean for something to be “public” today? The selections in this publication are a compilation of our semester-long exploration into this topic. Through images, blogs, and discussion, each author has developed his or her own approach to the notion of public, encompassing an expanded definition of the concept.

We have organized the content of the issue around common themes—public space, transportation, art, spatial boundaries, technology, and architecture—as we see these as crucial aspects of notions of public today. Our intention is to create an interconnected dialogue among the articles, while maintaining the individuality of each piece. These thematic groupings are not meant to be read in isolation, but rather considered in relation to each other.

The publication begins and ends with the concept of framing public space. Transportation shifts the discussion from the theoretical to the tangible, arriving at public art and physical boundaries. Technology explores the border created between the analogue and digital public realms, while also forming the separation between the two articles on privately owned public space. After a reflection on public in relation to specific works of architecture, the concluding article asserts the public’s role in curation, just as this publication seeks to curate notions of public itself.

Nicole Estevéz, Ethan Lowenthal, Catherine Lucia, Nick Mingrone

CURATING ARCHITECTURE: FALL 2012

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GINA CIANCONE .................................................. CC’14
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NAZLI DANIS ........................................................ BC’14
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# CONTENTS

## SPACE

- **THE FRAME** ................................................................. 1
  *NICK MINGRONE*

## TRANSPORTATION

- **MOVING CURATION** .......................................................... 3
  *GINA CIANCONE*

## ART

- **BEYOND THE BLEMISH** .................................................. 5
  *NINA CALDAS*

- **WHERE IS THE PUBLIC IN “PUBLIC ART”?** ........................... 7
  *NICOLE ESTEVEZ*

## BOUNDARIES

- **BORDERING PUBLICS BETWEEN EL PASO AND CIUDAD JUÁREZ** .... 9
  *SUZY BISHARA*

- **POPS ARE PEOPLE, MY FRIENDS?** .................................... 11
  *ETHAN LOWENTHAL*

## TECHNOLOGY

- **HUMANIZING THE DIGITAL** ........................................... 13
  *JUAN ESTRADA*

## BOUNDARIES

- **POPS; THERE’S AN APP FOR THAT** ...................................... 15
  *GABRIELLE KOZLOWSKI*

- **PUBLIC HOUSING** ............................................................ 17
  *CHUKWUKA NWABUZOR*

## ARCHITECTURE

- **DIANA, ALTSCHLUL, AND THE QUESTION OF PARTICIPATORY ARCHITECTURE** ........................................... 19
  *NAZLI DANIS*

- **FRAMING MONUMENTS** .................................................... 21
  *KELLY-ANNA LOULOUDIS*

## TRANSPORTATION

- **ON TRACK TO SAVING THE PLANET** .................................... 23
  *ISABELLA KELLEHER*

## SPACE

- **CURATING THE ENVELOPE** .............................................. 25
  *CATHERINE LUCIA*
THE FRAME

There is always a frame.
Space is not a vacuum but a stage, waiting for its performers to wake up and seize the limelight.


For five whole minutes on a cold Saturday afternoon in 2008, all of the Main Concourse in Grand Central Station stood still. Frozen. Of the crowd present in the terminal, about 200 individuals had meant to freeze. As agents of the group known as Improv Everywhere, they had planned it, and they knew the exact moment it was coming. This was a flashmob. Everyone else somehow stood up rather than froze. Stopped and looked around. No one seemed to know what was happening. Or what to do. There was no room to move. When people froze, Grand Central instantaneously ceased to perform its primary function—movement—because it froze too. Hectic though the terminal may have been, public transportation can’t do its job when the public is frozen. Not only was there a crowd that slowly choked the space as they filled it to the point of congestion, but now the crowd was literally blocking the way. And it wasn’t moving.


Static though architecture as a physical construct may be, both its transcription and its function are much more variable, even ephemeral, given the proper frame. The frame brings to architecture the ability to transform: infrastructure becomes intimate; safety becomes psychological; a unified whole falls apart; parks become pediments; windows become compositions; commuter terminals become stages; interior becomes exterior; old becomes new; private becomes public. The frame not only defines space—it molds space, controls it, and yet nothing about the physical architecture need change.

But what is the frame? It is transient, imaginary, invisible, and yet always implied, always present, always powerful. Whether we acknowledge it or not, the frame simply is. The frame is the director ruling our perception, and from it we derive function, code, behavior. We cannot escape it, and indeed we cannot separate its influence from reality. Like the commuters in Grand Central, expecting to meld with the flow of traffic in a comfortably busy space, when the frame changes suddenly or turns upon us we are disturbed. Like them, we feel uneasy and exposed. We want to leave until the situation is more comfortable and the reality before us is as we expect it so that the frame no longer confronts us.


The frame is a binary opposition: through it we are able to see and yet we also can be seen. We are the commuters. But we also encounter the flashmob. The frame can be literal or metaphorical. Or both. Indeed it is always metaphysical. With it we can mutate our surroundings and yet we actually, physically, change nothing about them. Through it we can perceive and yet it denies us perception free of distortion. Without a frame nothing is seen. There is nothing to see. Indeed without a frame, a paradoxical impossibility, architecture itself is nothing, and yet we always see it, always use it, constantly transform it. There is always a frame. Space is not a vacuum but a stage, waiting for its performers to wake up and seize the limelight. Because the frame always is, so too is our ability to control it.


Often times we are not conscious of the way things are framed and presented to us, unless the frame is modified.

The frame can be literal or metaphorical. Or both.

Indeed it is always metaphysical.

The thing is, we are programmed or unregulated space has a frame. When a flashmob freezes in the middle of Grand Central Station, nobody knows what to do. We know what to do when they are not there because this is the type of framing—the perception of a bustling and functioning space—that we are used to. But this is still a frame. The frame always holds a power over the users of architecture, as it can change the way one interacts with or perceives without changing anything about the actual thing itself. A photograph of the flashmob that froze Grand Central looks identical to a photograph of any other group of people in the same space. The frame is incredibly ephemeral, and yet for the people who experienced it for themselves, its power is undeniable, despite the fact that the actual space didn’t change. A space needn’t appear unusual later to feel unusual in the moment. A manipulation of the frame need not be, and generally isn’t, permanent.

This is all to say that there is always a potential distinction between the way a space is meant to be used and the way it is actually used, given the fact that the users themselves can manipulate the frame to override initial intentions or assumptions about a space and the way it is “supposed” to work. We draw cues about a space and how to behave in it from a combination of the way it is framed and the way we expect it to be framed. If these cues, and thus the frame, do not strike us as unusual or problematic, then it is likely safe to say that a space is being used as intended. Or at the very least, its current frame does not do anything to contradict or inhibit the intended use. In all cases, the frame can blur, reverse, or even eliminate the typical static mechanisms of a space. But once we are made aware of this metaphysical frame, the distinction between public and private itself becomes a much more tangible thing. “Public” becomes something we, as the public, can manipulate, control, perhaps even create.


Just as quickly as they had frozen and seized control of all of Grand Central, five long and incredibly still minutes later, 200 members of the Improv Everywhere flashmob sprung back into action in unison, carrying on as if nothing had happened. The most important thing that an awareness of the frame gives us is the ability to control a public space. As unassuming passersby, a manipulation of the frame before our eyes leaves us stunned

The frame not only defines space—it molds space, controls it, and yet nothing about the physical architecture need change.

and uneasy, like the Grand Central commuters. But if we recognize the impact of the frame and how it operates, we unlock the ability to maneuver like members of the flashmob. We are often simply the onlooking commuters, but we don’t have to be.

By their very definition public spaces are meant to be manipulated by the public. A public space is one in which anyone can temporarily borrow a portion of space for their own existence, use, or enjoyment, before moving on and again making that piece of space available to someone else. We all use, and to different extents, manipulate, public spaces around ourselves every day. The frozen flashmob did nothing invasive, aggressive, or illegal. They broke no rules. They simply created an effect that disrupted the way the surrounding public perceived the larger space as a whole, snapping focus away from individual fragments and bubbles of borrowed space, and in doing so they took control of the frame. Public space is subject to both those who use

“Public” becomes something we, as the public, can manipulate, control, perhaps even create.

it directly, and the larger context or situation in which it is framed. But the only distinction between us as users of public space and them as manipulators of the frame influencing public space is that no one has yet told us that we don’t have to settle for our own little piece. Even if it is only temporary, for a time we can control the whole thing.

MOVING CURATION

GINA CIANCONE

Through New York City’s emblematic skein of infrastructure, the city itself becomes a museum unfettered from the frozen interior of a building.

Each crisp, red line drawn on the papers in front of me looked disfigured. The colored circles were placed at points that varied between each sheet. It was as though the drawings were representing completely different subjects while, in fact, each sketch was actually a depiction of the New York City 7th Avenue subway line composed of five different, regular users. While taking the subway, I had asked random riders to map as much of the 7th Avenue subway line as possible without referring to a previously published map. The results submitted to me were shocking: riders had drawn their own spatial perception of the subway route. They had reshuffled the circuit of walking in the city while maintaining that regularly placed subway stops allowed public transportation hubs, and therefore the expanse of the city, to be easily accessible. Riders had, in fact, become curators of their own experience by demonstrating the impact they independently allow the subway to have on their own mental map of the city.

The subway system acts as a curator of New York City by establishing a hierarchal framework through which users are exposed to reliefs that adopt a cultural significance based on their location within an urban node of activity. While this framework is primarily constructed by the relationship between the subterranean station and its corresponding ground-level environment, decisions legislated by the Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA) provide an additional layer of curatorial choices that ultimately affect the experience of subway riders. Through New York City’s emblematic skein of infrastructure, the city itself becomes a museum unfettered from the frozen interior of a building. Passengers experience a new urban order associated with routes set underneath the city’s surface that pervasively parallel the street system which lays above.

Monuments that define an intersection of surface streets directly match the hierarchical significance of underground subway stations to which they correspond. Despite the blurred chronological relationships between the commercial development of a neighborhood and the completion of an intersecting subway line, advancements in each perpetuated a symbiotic relationship between the two. As commercial development in a specific area increased, analogous expansion of a subway line followed. Likewise, the addition of a subway station in an area would demand the need for commercial activity because of the swell in population, even if only during peak travel times. While the 59th street subway station arose from the need to provide inhabitants accessibility to the ever-growing Columbus Circle, Times Square did not become an urban icon until after a subway station traversed the district in 1904.

Highlighting urban landmarks through the networks of the New York City subway helped define the metropolises as emblematic. To both tourists and regular users of the subway system, the city appears to be a sprawl of colossal relics that previously bolstered New York City’s claim to municipal dominance on both a national and global scale. While the subway system underscores aspects of New York City that contribute to its iconic nature, what does the transport network leave out? The most frequently neglected aspect of New York City along the 7th Avenue Subway Line is residential areas—spaces of less commercial development that occur at points farthest away from nodes of activity commonly denoted by a subway station. There is both a presence of absence and a resulting lack of its documentation within the subway system that further present a biased view of New York City to travellers.

By reformating the accessibility of the city, the subway system establishes itself as a semi-public means of transportation. Biking and walking present nearly all boroughs of New York City as easily accessible; yet, both transportation methods require a certain level of physical ability not demanded by subway use. Additionally, biking and walking do not require the queuing fees associated with subway fares. Subway travel fragments our visual navigation of the city by limiting interactions with the streetscape to whatever can infiltrate downwards into the subway station. Whether it is dust, homeless wanderers, or commercial advertisements that permeate the subway, there is an evelon of spatial segmentation generated from the disconnection between subway stops.

Travelers craft a mental image of the city based on the encounters they have had with it. The psychological maps charted by the 4.3 million people that travel on the subway each day is entirely limited by the stations from which they enter and exit. These nodes of urban activity provide a direct level of engagement with the city that becomes lost in the underground routes of commute. Unlike the grand subway stations of Moscow or the monumental stops in Washington, D.C., the New York circular network is intrinsically uncharacteristic. Despite the potential of the subway to highlight characteristics of the streetscape, it denies users with the continuous panorama of the ground-level urban landscape.

In addition to framing of New York City, the circulation network also employs curatorial acts of the subway itself. Food options limited to snack items, define subway stations as purely transitory areas. This decision, legislated by the MTA, ensured that users were not invited to dine within stations but rather pressured to use the tunnels purely as a means travel. Performances within the subway tunnels and train cars are also aspects of the commuting experience that are regulated by the MTA. These deliberately rationalized choices by the bureaucratic administration presiding over New York City’s subway present a new and dynamic urban power that affects our own spatial perception.

A close relationship has developed between the seemingly tangled network of subway tunnels and the relentlessly logical gridded street system that rests atop it. The two create a parallel environment that establishes a layering of municipal strength that affects the experience of travelers. While the MTA exerts a subtle control over how travelers navigate through subway tunnels, the grid system represents a more obvious control on the ability of inhabitants to orient themselves within their urban context. According to the writing of 20th-century French philosopher, Michel Foucault, in Discipline and Power, those in positions of authority ‘manage things in such a way that the exercise of power is not added from the outside, like a rigid, heavy constraint to the functions it invests, but is so subtly present in them as to increase their efficiency by itself increasing its own point of contact’ (201). Indeed, the vast majority of riders unknowingly chronicle their own journey through the subway by recognizing and subsequently adopting certain curatorial choices of those in authoritative positions. Users navigate through the subway unintentionally rationalizing the decisions previously made by transportation engineers, bureaucratic agencies, and commercial designers. It is a balance of power, where ultimately power’s ‘effectiveness is seen as resulting from its inevitability not from its visible intensity’ (8).

Once again, I found myself looking down at the five mental maps previously sketched by the randomly selected subway riders I had employed in my social experiment. Each map was not only a chart of riders’ own spatial perception, but also became a study as to their success in resisting the limitations imposed by the fragmented nature of their subway route. While most of the drawings clearly outlined stations associated with urban landmarks, such as Columbus Circle, Lincoln Center, and Times Square, one in particular could only map a few stops: 157th Street, 50th Street, and South Ferry. If riders understand the controls imposed on them that limit their overall vision of the city, they have the potential to resist the subtle authority glossed over their entire urban experience and regain control.

Continued on page 26
My parents’ disdain for an art so commonplace in other neighborhoods was influential: I learned that graffiti was bad. Graffiti was vandalism. It was illegal and it was ugly.

I grew up in Maspeth, a busy blue-collar neighborhood in Queens bordering Brooklyn. I moved from Maspeth to Long Island when I was about 8 years old, so I don’t really have too many memories of my life in Queens besides those I have from within my own home, and my neighborhood experiences were limited to whatever I could see while in the car with my parents. Despite this, there is one moment that especially sticks out in my mind. We drove past a man standing against a fence, can of bright blue spray paint in hand, drawing over a bright white fence in the middle of the day. My mom scowled and shook her head, and my dad made some comment about how whatever this man was doing was wrong. We drove by him fairly quickly but in those few moments when the man was in sight, my parents passed judgment. I didn’t really know what was going on back then, but I could obviously sense their disappointment—even frustration—with what this man that they had never met or seen before was doing.

At the time I may not have known exactly why my parents reacted the way they did, but I’ve never forgotten their reaction. I lived in a part of my neighborhood where graffiti was not very common. I never saw it on my walk to school or to the corner store, and I only remember seeing graffiti in neighborhoods where my mom always told me to “keep my eyes wide open at all times.” Despite my lack of exposure to graffiti, my parents’ disdain for an art so commonplace in other neighborhoods was influential: I learned that graffiti was bad. Graffiti was vandalism. It was illegal, and it was ugly.

I hadn’t given graffiti much more thought after that until 2003, in my 7th grade art class. My teacher asked us to create a nametag on a subway car template, using a graffiti style. I remember thinking this was strange to be asked to work with graffiti style lettering. This project sure wasn’t going to look like the art I had gone to see at the Guggenheim and the Met so many times with my dad. Aside from the simple fact that I had never considered graffiti to be an “Artistic style,” I was confused as to what graffiti was doing in my art classroom in the first place. To me, this graffiti-inspired project seemed completely out of place in my new suburban neighborhood on Long Island. Despite my hesitations with the assignment, I went ahead with it, and actually liked how my nametag turned out. I didn’t know why, but the nametag seemed to work, and I actually thought it was pretty, for lack of a better word.

Isn’t that peculiar? Something I grew up thinking was nothing more than vandalism, and a display of complete and utter disrespect for one’s environment was at the same time, somehow pretty. My nametag, a simple object in itself, was actually appealing to me. Could it have just been the fact that it was a work that I had produced myself? Maybe. But then, why was I finding my classmates’ graffiti-style nametags so appealing as well? Could this outside aesthetic be vandalism and art at the same time?

This tension that exists between graffiti, or graffiti-style representation, and my perception of what can be considered art is to a certain degree, quite obvious, yet at the same time still highly provocative. The intrinsic dichotomy of graffiti makes its role in society ambiguous—when is it vandalism, and when is it art? Maybe it has something to do with the context in which we see this “graffiti.” On a painted white fence in Queens, it was vandalism, and “ugly.” But on the subway car template for my art folder, it was art, and “pretty.” Graffiti is highly visible in its immediate urban context, and its in-your-face quality makes it hard to overlook—a fact which ensures that graffiti is a consistent feature of urban public spaces, and that graffiti’s underlying messages, whether they be political, artistic, or purely expressive, are seen by a wide and varied public audience. Graffiti has long been associated with vandalism, defacement, and urban degradation; anyone who grew up in New York City in the 1970s could tell you that graffiti invaded and completely took over every aspect of the subway system. The subway car graffiti epidemic, while considered to be one of the biggest moments in the development of New York City graffiti, was also considered to be one of the major eyesores of New York City, and was later almost entirely eliminated through an extensive urban renewal project. However, simply because graffiti was removed from its original domain (where it had garnered its reputation as vandalism) did not mean that negative perceptions of it changed as well. The subway cars may have been cleaned up, but attitudes towards graffiti remained tainted with memories of the past.

Regardless of what people may have thought of graffiti during the 1970s, this period in time represents the high point of the underground graffiti movement, when it was at its most visible. In addition to the subway cars, other readily visible and highly utilized areas of the city, such as the exteriors of buildings and highway overpasses became canvases for graffiti artists, as well, a practice that became increasingly common as New York City’s efforts to keep the MTA clean of graffiti became stronger and stronger. These locations provided graffiti artists with alternative areas that were large enough to effectively communicate and practice their craft. The 1970s and 1980s were decades of complex contradiction in the world of graffiti. Characterized by its enthusiasts as the movement’s high-point, it was the time when graffiti received the majority of its criticism and condemnation from outside authorities and the general public, yet nevertheless remained a fixture of the New York City urban scene. Graffiti simply refused to die out, suggesting that it had a quality that, at least for the artists themselves, was worthy of preserving: a quality that perhaps eventually could be seen by the public.

Graffiti’s resilience against outside forces trying to smother the movement, however strong they might have been, is not enough to explain how public perception towards graffiti itself had changed. Had that been the case, graffiti’s existence on its own would have perhaps been completely accepted from the beginning, without a need for outside involvement. How did attempts to erase the colorful scribbles off of MTA subway cars then lead to their eventual acceptance? While the answer itself may be impossible to firmly identify, looking at the influence of outside artists, such as Jean-Michel Basquiat and Keith Haring, may provide some direction.

While neither Basquiat nor Haring belonged to the spray-paint graffiti culture of New York City’s subways, they both got their starts through the practice of producing unsolicited street art. Haring became a recognizable street artist through his depictions of very simplistic, yet powerful, cartoon-like figures such as babies, dogs, and flying saucers, drawn with white chalk. Basquiat’s tag, “SAMO,” meaning “same old shit,” became a standard fixture on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. Both Haring and Basquiat were influenced by artist Andy Warhol, and their collaborations with Warhol certainly aided in their becoming major figures in the art world. Basquiat became an acclaimed Neo-Expressionist artist, and Haring used his artistic talents to forward his interests in social activism. Basquiat and Haring demonstrated how through a merger with high art, their low art could gain prominence and recognition by society on a much larger scale than what was typical for a local graffiti artist. Their graffiti-inspired works were able to enter a more visible and culturally accepted art realm and reach a wider audience, in comparison to the more limited scale of visibility at which they were working before.

Haring and Basquiat’s involvement with more traditionally recognized art movements may have helped to change public opinion about graffiti itself. While the subway graffiti movement is a mere memory in today’s society, the nostalgia created by the shift of graffiti from vandalism to art continues to influence the manner in which society views works of graffiti. Eric Felisbret, a former illegal graffiti artist, runs the website @149st, “the cyber bench documenting NYC graffiti,” the name of which refers to one of the graffiti movement’s most famous spots, the writer’s bench off of the 149th Street and Grand Concourse stop on the No. 2 line, where artists would come together to trade ideas. Felisbret’s site showcases an extensive and highly comprehensive collection of documentation of graffiti that spans a period of nearly thirty years, organized with a level of formality (a history of NYC graffiti and alphabetized Continued on page 26
WHERE IS THE PUBLIC?

The inconspicuous white cube atop several stories of scaffolding gives very little evidence of what lies within: an installation of a constructed living room that envelops Gaetano Russo’s 1892 statue of Christopher Columbus.

Where is the public in “public” art? Without the few signs and media coverage of the piece, Japanese artist Tatzu Nishi’s installation in Columbus Circle, Discovering Columbus (2012), could easily be mistaken for any other part of the typical cityscape of New York. The inconspicuous white cube atop several stories of scaffolding gives very little evidence of what lies within: an installation of a constructed living room that envelops Gaetano Russo’s 1892 statue of Christopher Columbus. In order to enter the installation, one must order timed tickets that are available for free somewhere in the Time Warner Building or online through the Public Art Fund’s chaotic website. It is frustrating for those who must wander around the building to find the kiosk or check online for every time slot just to find availability to the seemingly popular, sold-out piece.

What happens if you do not arrive exactly on time? One advantage is that the staff still allows visitors to enter at any point during the allotted thirty-minute sessions as long as they have a ticket. Despite the safety warnings that the Public Art Fund’s site provides about the infrastructure paired with the liability waiver that you must read and sign off on to access the space, nothing really does prepare you for the six-story climb up the anxiety-inducing scaffolding that has been erected around the sculpture. The sounds of the cars, taxis, and buses gliding around the rotunda along with the unsuspecting pedestrians below accompany the climb up. By the time you actually arrive at the landing, out of breath and slightly weary for your life, all you want to do is get to this statue. Luckily there is a living room to lounge away.

I limited my exposure to media and images in preparation for my critical visit. I had an idea of what I might encounter, but as with any exhibition or artwork, nothing is more powerful than a first-hand experience. Finally reaching the landing, one walks through a threshold into a lit hallway with wood floors, side tables, and images of New York hung on the wall warmed by several temporary space heaters installed high on the walls.

By passing the attendants of the installation, who float around the space leading groups of people in and out for thirty-minute intervals at a time, visitors then enter the massive room that envelops the statue of Columbus. With the numerous soft-toned lights illuminating the room, the feel of the installation quickly shifts from a rushed experience of getting to the top of the stairs on a cold, dark fall night to a relaxed, seemingly comfortable setting. In addition to the massive sculpture and the quirky pink and yellow wallpaper with images of Marilyn Monroe, Elvis, and Mickey Mouse among others, the space is decorated with a deep purple sectional, a flat screen TV as well as side and coffee tables with books and newspapers. The intention is the creation of a space that would otherwise not exist, projecting a possibility that is not common in New York—one view being the grouping of complete strangers several stories above ground in a questionable structure with a massive sculpture that one regularly ignores.

However, it is also a manifestation of the exclusion that this installation produces. The domestic setting of the installation makes the visitors, unknown to one another, feel at home and privileged in this decorated space while the city and life moves about them and a colossal statue grounds them.

So what then about this work makes it public? Acquiring tickets is a process that requires you to know exactly when you would like to go, granted space is available, maneuvering through the ticketing site that leaves even the most patient a bit distressed. Once tickets are scanned, visitors must subject themselves to being surrounded by a handful of attendants and people throughout the visit. If all of this is required, what can the work and the Public Art Fund make to legitimize the status of the installation as public when this initial first step makes many assumptions about accessibility to tickets, but also the space itself both physically and mentally.

On a formal level, there is also something to be said of the tension between interior and exterior. The repelling exterior should not be discounted in a city where scaffolding is as ubiquitous as cabs or people and the piece arguably blends in with its surroundings. This installation creates the illusion of a public space. Yet, aside from the signs covering the base of the structure providing passersby with information, the installation’s exterior is completely uninviting. Granted, this is the realm within which Tatzu Nishi works. His fifteen-year career is defined by these spatial interventions and transformations. The question is what exactly are Nishi’s intentions with his work and the monuments he envelops and recontextualizes. What statements about urban environments and their relationships with people are completely left out of one’s visit to Columbus Circle that Nishi may be wanting to make known?

This depends on how one regards the artist and his work. Based on the writing of French urban theorist Michel de Certeau’s chapter titled “Making Do: Uses and Tactics” in The Practice of Everyday Life (1984), the installation may be viewed as what de Certeau calls a “strategy,” a strategy being the exercise of power in a spatial realm. Nishi erected this installation in one of the most recently developed and highly valued neighborhoods in New York. Columbus Circle has some of the premier dining and real estate in the city. To what extent then is Tatzu Nishi trying to expose the city and make a space where visitors are able to escape the constructs of the city and urban life and also disrupt it?

One may argue that it is very much so with the very work itself and also its stark exterior and pleasant interior. Nishi’s installation and the presence of the visitors within may be considered a practice of de Certeau’s definition of a “tact.” This is the ability to acknowledge the modes of power at play and work within this system to counter it. This is done not only with the physical construction of the installation in the rotunda, but also with visitors being in this unusual vantage point several stories above the hustle and bustle of urbanity that runs our lives. For those conscious of this dialogue, this exercise of the tactic is what happens to an extent when they enter this space. However, one is still being watched and directed in the installation, which greatly hinders this feeling of control. Furthermore, there is no escaping the outside world as the statue of Columbus reminds us of our temporal pleasure, its scale also a mark of our insignificance on the ground. In addition to the presence of other people and the television, which was airing CNN’s coverage of the presidential election, it is difficult to completely remove oneself from what is just outside. It is also important to note that the Public Art Fund, which had to work with city officials to let the work come into fruition, commissioned the artist, so there is the added presence of figures of authority who may have affected the conception of the work and shaped the final product.

Tatzu Nishi’s work may be the new artwork that everyone is talking about, but far fewer may be as critical. It is a challenge to situate the work and the artist on either side of the spectrum given that little is known about the artist and his relatively young career. What is clear, however, is the continued interaction New York City has with its people and those who want to engage with the city. As the installation evidences, however, this fusion of the public sphere and art does not come without conflict. What one can hope is that a consciousness of this exists.
The border is what defines these two cities; it can symbolize both barriers and opportunity.

According to the American Community Survey, in 2010, El Paso, Texas had claimed a population of 86% Latino, an increase of the reported 80% in 2008. Of the Latino population, 75% are Mexican. Even though there is a physical boundary, on both sides of the border Spanish is spoken frequently. Latin music is often heard, authentic Mexican food is abundant, and Mexican holidays are well celebrated.

The 'border', defined by a twenty-foot fence and reinforced by border patrol, is the dividing line between the otherwise akin populations. The standards of life are products of the level of security and potentially determined by the ruling bodies within each country. However, the United States is a country with values based on fairness and equality while the Mexican police and army are widely corrupt and infiltrated with individuals who support drug cartels and their purposes. Ciudad Juñarez has fallen victim to the resulting violence pushing many of its citizens north of the border.

Due to the population influx, El Paso has exponentially grown over the past few years displaying a need of services to accommodate its growing population. For this reason, Neilesh Patel has moved to El Paso from San Jose, California to work as a dentist. Dr. Patel runs a health volunteer organization and has provided dental care in many remote Latin American cities. Dr. Patel resided in El Paso from June 2008 until November 2010 during which time he practiced dentistry while crossing the border a few times to witness the neighboring conditions.

Suzy Bishara: So what brought you to El Paso?

Neilesh Patel: The need for healthcare professionals in El Paso is the highest in the nation and having learned the Spanish language throughout school and college I felt that I am capable of communicating with a primarily Spanish speaking population, I also felt familiar with the population being that I had previously provided volunteer healthcare services in several countries in South America. So when presented with the opportunity, and knowing that El Paso borders a large metropolitan Mexican city, I gladly relocated to fill the position.

SB: Can you tell me more about your patient population in El Paso? And how would you compare El Paso to your hometown of San Jose?

NP: Most of my patients were Mexican with limited English understanding; some of them actually had their current address in Mexico and were commuting across the border on a daily basis. San Jose is more densely populated, more diverse and more costly than El Paso. What I miss the most is the variety present in San Jose that is definitely lacking in El Paso. I am fond of the Mexican culture, but being of Asian descent, I feel that I particularly stood out in El Paso. Most of the restaurants here serve Mexican food and grocery stores provide for a primarily Hispanic population.

SB: What is the border crossing between the two countries like? Did you ever cross the border into Mexico and how was your experience?

NP: The locals have informed me that for a long time Ciudad Juñarez was more esteemed than El Paso in that it offers ample low budget entertainment and has a lower legal drinking age making it a common place to frequent on weekends. Border crossing is normally done by car or on foot and was simple before the rise of suspicion produced by the violence in Juñarez.

I had intended to reside in Juñarez and work in the US due to the lower living cost in Mexico. I took my first trip to Juñarez investigating housing opportunities in late 2008; I went with my coworker and two undercover cops in an unarmed bullet proof SUV. The Mexican authorities gave us much trouble crossing the border, as they were concerned as to what the SUV could be carrying. We didn’t go far into Juñarez but stopped at an upscale empty restaurant where the workers informed us that the place is abandoned due to shooting that took place the night before. Later we arrived at an upscale neighborhood with great apartments but through our drive, we encountered about ten different police confrontations with citizens exchanging gunfire.

The second time, I went was with a coworker and the intention was for a regular night out in Juñarez. We went to a festival, had a meal, watched folklore dancing and later on went to a nightclub overrun by teenagers. This club was considered safe, as it was only a few yards from the border. When in Juñarez, one generally wants to stay nearby the American border, as it is considered safe due to the presence of American border patrol.

The third time was different, it was in May of 2009 and my healthcare volunteer organization had received a grant from the Starbucks Foundation towards healthcare supplies. We partnered with Christian Hand in Action and organized a volunteer mission to cross the border. We collected supplies and managed to organize a team of eight medical staff. The night before our trip, we took the vans to get examined by the Mexican border patrol and during the investigation crossover began between the authorities and some citizens, which to them seemed normal. The following morning we crossed the border along with two military Hummer vehicles that were provided for our protection. We provided health services in a church located in a turbulent part of the city where about a hundred patients arrived for care—a number significantly lower than that of previous years due to the scare and ongoing chaos in the city.

The fourth time I crossed the border with a friend for surveillance. The two of us went to the city center in El Paso and crossed through the pedestrian bridge.

Immediately after crossing, I felt that we were in danger. Bystanders watched and followed us carefully, we promptly decided to cross back but the Mexican border patrol informed us that we need to pay ten pesos each and that they do not accept US dollars. That being said, we were forced to walk shortly after crossing.

“I immediately after crossing, I felt that we were in danger.”

In a street where 90% of the stores were indefinitely closed but we managed to find an open store where the worker informed us that the security worsened and the only reason why her store is still open is because of its proximity to the American border, but the other vendors could not handle the continuous looting and shut down. She concluded these cartels are savages and they infiltrated the army. We obtained twenty pesos, and crossed the border into the US. That was my last visit to Juñarez.

SB: How do you feel the presence of this border influences the citizens on both sides?

NP: The border is what defines these two cities. On the American side Mexicans see it as the immediate gate back to their roots while on the Mexican side it is seen as the entrance to opportunity. Either way it provides a channel through which roots and opportunities are exchanged providing an influx of Mexican culture to El Paso reshaping the understanding of an American city and while hard to establish what the American city gives back, it is evident that it provides a haven to those who flee injustice and chaos in the turbulent Juñarez.

SB: What do you feel is the main difference between the Mexicans living in Mexico and those living in El Paso?

NP: It is hard to distinguish between the two, from what I see the main difference between the Mexicans in the United States is if they have legal paperwork or not. Being a legal citizen of the United States provides the citizen with an opportunity to acquire a job that would at least provide the minimum pay along with benefits while an illegal person is faced with the instability of an auxiliary job that depends on their boss who generally wants to provide lower than average pay and no benefits. Another thing to note is that illegal citizens are under the threat of being reportly at anytime and would go extreme measures to please their employers.
P.O.P.S. ARE PEOPLE, MY FRIENDS? ETHAN LOWENTHAL

What sort of rules should any developer be allowed to impose on a ‘public’ space? What role should access to public space play in urban life?

Can you name something you might have sat on, walked on, ate in, or met someone in? Where you can stop for a minute, lounge for an hour, lay down in but not sleep in, or watch on the news without knowing it exists? What about something that anyone can use but corporations own, with the guise of freedom but the reality of control? It is a place where you can take a photo, ride a skateboard, play music, play cards but get thrown out by a guard, or camp for weeks to protest capitalism—becoming the one watched on the news. Publicly Owned Private Spaces, known as POPS, inhabit a grey area in the taxonomy of New York’s urban spaces—interior and exterior locations that are ostensibly spatially open to the public, but legally maintained and regulated by private entities. However, recently more and more attention is being drawn to this public-private arrangement. These once relatively uncontroversial areas have become embroiled in debate, particularly after the Occupy Wall Street movement camped in Zuccotti Park and questioned the very nature of the program: does the creation of a rule against long-term occupation conflict with an owner’s legal requirement to leave certain parks open to the public 24 hours? With regards to any of these places around the city, what sort of rules should any developer be allowed to impose on a ‘public’ space? What role should access to public space play in urban life?

We should understand that these spaces are not simply gifts from the city (or to the city); they are part of an exchange with developers to gain increased building floor area for relinquishing floor-space at ground level back to the public. While split into 503 locations, this exchange represents the built area of seven Empire State Buildings for the equivalent of a tenth of Central Park—no small transaction. Besides the issues of legality, such a massive trade should make us ask: is it a fair trade? Do these spaces even work? Truly, the right of the public to the city is at stake here.

Incredibly, according to the report completed by Professor Jerold S. Kayden on behalf of the Department of City Planning, only 16 percent of all of these spaces are effectively utilized (meaning deemed “actively used as regional destinations or neighborhood gathering spaces”), leading to a third set of questions: why are the vast majority of these spaces failures? Who actually gains from the exchange? Could corporate bodies ever be the right managers for them anyway? If not, then should the program even continue to exist? Why should we expect developers to share any of the land they own in the first place?

To answer these questions, I propose a brief examination of the series of precedents that led to the POPS policy, which clearly demonstrates its initial basis in active awareness of urban problems and public interest. Around the turn of the 20th century, increased building heights presented a critical problem to the city, namely the threat to light and air on the ground. You can still see the solution today in New York’s forest of stepped skyscrapers—the setback rules of the 1916 Zoning Resolution, captured in a famous set of drawings by Hugh Ferriss called “The Four Stages,” suggested various architectural responses, clearly presenting these ordinances as possibilites rather than restrictions. Architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe developed a second solution four decades later in the iconic Seagram Building—rather than step the rise of the skyscraper, he instead set the building back from the street behind an open plaza. Thus the idea of the privately owned public space was born: the success of this plaza inspired a second zoning resolution in 1961 creating the POPS agreement. However, we should see a crucial flaw therein. As we have observed, each of these previous developments sought to replace the problem of urban congestion with an opportunity to create beneficial public space. Yet according to Kayden, the only essential term of the agreement was setting the ratio of bonus build space for each foot of public space created (varying depending on the type). Notice no mention of required function. Can we assume that developers would automatically design high-quality public space without any incentives or mandates? Certainly not.

This is not to say that incentives never existed. Developers that rented out their ground floors to commercial ventures exploited the POPS system to create an accompanying commercial zone, but are these glorified food courts and shopping strips really the public plazas sought by the city in the exchange or are they just a manipulation of the law for financial benefit (acquiring the expanded building privileges for open space they would have wanted in front of their commercial zones anyway)? It seems that the incentive to maintain these spaces is tied to the economic success of the surrounding shops rather than addressing public needs, bringing us back to the issue of private rules in a public space.

What makes these spaces public? Is the space still public if only customers can use the seating? Is the space still public if anyone can use the seating, but they cannot move the seats around? Is the space still public if anyone can move the seats around, but the number and activity of people in a visiting group are restricted so as not to discourage potential customers? With the exception of requiring non-exclusive spaces open 24 hours, the zoning resolution is remarkably inexact about the actual operating procedures of these spaces beyond hygienic maintenance, leaving the owners completely free to impose their own ‘reasonable’ regulations. Consider POPS that do not necessarily have direct commercial aims. Unlike government-managed public land, these privately-owned spaces ultimately reflect upon a particular vested interest: the maintenance of a static, controlled corporate image, as opposed to the organic urban interactions one expects of a public space. It is most likely in the pursuit of this appearance of stability that private owners construct these rules; even the 24-hour mandate can be overruled for night-closure by appealing to the City Planning Commission in exchange for other concessions—sleeping homeless people apparently do not fit the corporate image. Yet more conventional uses of ‘public’ space are often prohibited as well. Can you imagine the New York government forbidding the playing of music in parks, whether via radios or live musicians? Banning skateboards and roller blades? Preventing people from handing out flyers or raising awareness about political or social issues? Outlawing the simple act of taking a photograph? Why do we so readily accept the authority of the ever-present POPS guards to enforce such rules on seemingly ‘public’ land? Perhaps it is because as far as the owners are concerned, we might as well think of these spaces as private; their definition of ‘unwarranted behavior’ certainly veers awfully close to such a characterization.

Apart from the occasional frustration of being denied the right to photograph (though clearly much more is at stake), it was not until the Occupy Wall Street movement that these tensions were brought to a breaking point. As we can see, developers are perfectly comfortable with passive public use, so long as this use does not entail any kind of active, engaging—let alone transformative—activity. After all, what can possibly be more public than hundreds of people camping in an open park, with constant media presence bringing the events into homes around the country? Nonetheless, police cleared the park on the 15th of November, but on the request of the owner of park rather than the government (which of course technically did not own the land), claiming unsanitary and hazardous conditions. Who can say whether this was actually the case or not, but the fact that it was

For POPS to truly join the rich urban fabric of New York’s public spaces, they have to actually be public.

the owner requesting the removal, as well as the new, more stringent rules the owner imparted on the plaza afterwards, point toward other factors. Various POPS in the area likewise changed their rules: restrictions on group meetings have attempted to disrupt Occupy Wall Street ‘workshops’ held in them and posters and signs have been banned as well. Let alone violating city law, can we not argue this is a limitation of First Amendment rights, especially egregious since it is on public land! Shouldn’t law enforcement be responding to its own laws drafted by elected representatives, not the rules of private corporations accountable to the public?

Of course this discussion has only been challenging the 16% of POPS that are actually even considered successful.
Never in human history has a technology so knowledgeable of our essentials, our goals and our fears, existed on such a massive scale.

What does it mean to live a digital lifestyle? To those in the developed world born after 2000, it is the only lifestyle they have known. “Digital Natives,” as coined by Marc Prensky in Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants, have been brought up in a society where clocks no longer tick, home phones rarely ring, and chalk boards hardly screech – where their daily activities since birth rely on accessing a multi-functional dimension separate from physical existence. These Natives accept digital technologies without hesitation, unaware of what some claim to be fundamental human qualities left behind in the analog practices of the past – especially in the fields of art and architecture, where digital methods have gained popularity for producing, reviewing, and curating works.

As Prensky’s title implies, a second group called “Digital Immigrants” comprises the subset of the population who have had to transition into a digital lifestyle. Their scope of understanding is diverse, determined by both the amount of exposure they have had to digital technologies and the social pressures demanding that they adopt them. It is within this group – a rather large and powerful one – where opinions vary and practices diverge. Whether nostalgic, fervent about the lessons and inherent qualities they assert are being lost amidst this change, or simply unable to keep up with the ever-increasing pace of technological output, they disagree even amongst themselves on the values and outcomes at stake.

While such concerns about the digital may seem somewhat surprising to Natives lacking the trans-generational point of view that allows Immigrants to draw comparisons, they are actually quite common phenomena in the long history of technological innovation. The past has shown that breakthroughs in communication, transportation, and visualization, like photography and film, have all been met with criticism and suspicion from skeptics refusing to forsake the systems previously in order, fostering discourse about the merits and highlighting key generational differences of opinion. Yet, unlike its previous counterparts, the digital breakthrough stands out for both its magnitude and speed.

Fostering within a climate of globalization, and fueled by a sophisticated understanding of energy, digital technology has spread across nations, controlling domestic and international transportation as well as entire economies. Perhaps the most successful of such technologies, the internet, now takes a central role in the lives of Natives and Immigrants alike, serving as a centralized medium for educational resources, communication, and entertainment. Wireless connections to the internet can now be found throughout cities and towns, some privately owned while others free to the public. Never in human history has a technology so thorough, so knowledgeable of our essentials, our goals and our fears, existed in such a massive scale.

Living in a world addicted to the new, where the present is filled with so much change that the past is free to scurry by unseen, it can be difficult to consider the consequences and losses resulting from such a quotidian adoption of digital technologies. Many Immigrants, however, have experienced such change during key periods in their lives, some even during the transition from school to work, allowing them to reflect on the differences between the previous standards and their newer digital counterparts.

In the fields of art, architecture, and the curatorial practices surrounding them, where change serves as a catalyst for developing styles and movements, it is not surprising that digital technology has brought about such differences in opinion. Thriving on change itself as a catalyst for developing styles and movements, art and architecture rely on active discourse, the rejection of norms, technological advancement, and ardent criticism to expand. And while the digital revolution provides these factors, as have other technological revolutions in the past, it certainly widens their implications when considering the drastic effects it has had on definitions of “public” as well as the physical boundaries human were accustomed to in previous eras.

As discussed by Walter Benjamin in The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction, the definition of public pertaining to art is deeply connected to a work’s intention and the mediums through which it is produced. He asserts that most prehistoric cave drawings held a “cult value” due to their ritualistic purposes, created to please non-human deities. Upon being discovered and transported to be displayed as works of art, they lost their cult value and instead gain “exhibition value,” which Benjamin argues becomes increasingly important as new technologies facilitate reproduction. The issue of physical boundaries is also analyzed via a quality he calls “aura,” which exists only in the original piece and is eliminated by transposing the work to other mediums. Mechanical reproduction thus strips art of all auras and complicates the discussion when considering mediums meant to be reproduced, such as photography and film. Furthermore, the experiential qualities associated with physically visiting works of art and architecture in their original contexts are altered by the development of museums, magazines, and movie theaters. Such mediums both narrow works to visual stimuli and break down the power structures previously in place (many works of art were exclusively reserved for the enjoyment of royalty, religious elite, and the wealthy).

In my opinion, Benjamin’s arguments, in light of the digital revolution, highlight a historical trend towards what seems to be society’s desire to free art and architecture from privatization and physicality, culminating in a medium which itself has no single owner nor location. With technologies becoming more affordable, the endless possibilities of the digital are becoming available to millions each day around the world. It is important to note that digital technology is not simply limited to the internet but also hundreds of other systems including Bluetooth, cell phone communication, and satellite transmissions, just to name a few. Recent movies, museum galleries, and magazine publications can be accessed from nearly anywhere in the world, further diminishing the power structure of institutions still in place. To add insult to injury, recent events have shown that our laws are of little use when copyright violations travel across borders mercilessly, when self-taught hackers can outperform the creators of the medium itself, and when social media websites can enable protests that alter the entire course of a country’s history in a matter of weeks.

Institutions and organizations cannot ignore such a force, and have done a decent job of adapting in recent years. Digital design software has become a fundamental element of art and architecture education as well as a requirement for most employers. University curating programs incorporate digital components dealing with data retrieval practices as well as an understanding of the various platforms developed. Magazines, newspapers, and museums now have websites, blogs, and social media profiles to increase their outreach and please their audiences. Yet, in a world where such technologies are available to everyone, where architecture students and self-taught designers alike can design spectacular buildings in Rhino, where professional curators and pre-teens can creative exhibits via Pinterest, why bother with these older methods? Why attempt to join a prestigious publication when you can simply create your own? Why should prestigious publications continue to produce printed text when they can choose to fully go online? Why should curators undergo the stress of physically acquiring works to install inside museums with extensive bureaucracies, when they can create interactive and three-dimensional experiences from the comfort of their own couch?

I think the answer to these questions lies in the arguments digital immigrants propose, which deal with the emotional and psychological qualities associated with physical production and having a known audience - so easily dismissed by Natives. As argued by Craig Mod in his article “How magazines will be changed forever”, the limits of physically provide us with a psychologically gratifying definite sense of completion that is entirely absent in the “petrifying” and “boundless” abyss of the digital. Whether completing a university program, physically drawing building elevations, or curating an exhibition one can be fully certain of the finality after the act is accomplished. The digital realm, however, is the realm of the endless; how can one gain a sense of completion from an online exhibit or publication that can be updated infinitely? How can digital drawings be considered finalized when the model could have been displayed in an infinite amount of perspectives? Are you sure you chose the right one? It would only require a few clicks…

The second point brought up by

Continued on page 26
P.O.P.S.-THERE'S AN APP FOR THAT

Gabrielle Kozlowski

We need a way to make these spaces more accessible to the public, a way to let the people know that these spaces are there and ready to be used.

In 1961, Privately Owned Public Spaces were formed as part of a deal between developers and City Planning and the creation of these spaces, affectionately referred to as POPS, served as extensions of the privately owned spaces and varied from indoor and outdoor spaces, to arcades and plazas. Regardless of their form, these spaces were meant for public use, even though only 60% of these 500 spaces are intact, according to Jerold Kayden, a Professor of Urban Planning and Design at Harvard University. Kayden has headlined the movement to organize these POPS, an effort that was necessary to increase awareness and usage of these spaces, but simultaneously called for improvements and better maintenance of the sites. Kayden has gone so far as to publish a detailed book Private Owned Public Space: The New York City Experience in 2000 that provides a POPS map of each neighborhood in Manhattan, Brooklyn and Queens. His effort has inspired multiple websites that divide the city and breakdown the POPS by neighborhood and include interactive maps and photographs that highlight each space individually. However, these resources are only helpful if you know they exist, and who even reads actual books anymore? Kayden’s book is easily accessed from an academic library and is not easily available for the general public, so we need something that can be.

The use of technology and social media have become an essential part of our lives, and integrating it into the use POPS is something to be considered. Walking around New York City, you might notice a sign that has a tree on it in front of certain spaces, but most likely you won’t. These signs highlight POPS, but they go unnoticed, and as a college student and four-year resident of Manhattan, I myself never noticed.

We need something more. We need a way to make these spaces more accessible to the public, a way to let the people know that these spaces are there and ready to be used. Accessibility does not simply refer to entrance points, but it also refers to its ability to invite people into the space. People are less likely to enter a run-down space compared to a space they are familiar with and see other people using. I think the lack of accessibility is made evident through Kayden’s study, which shows that about 40% of the spaces are completely useless. They are inaccessible and do not serve a purpose for New York City’s public. Some offer seating, places to sit and eat, and some even have cafes. However, not all of them function this way. Although they are privately owned, these spaces belong to us, the public, and we don’t take advantage of them the way we could, but it’s not entirely our fault. We need a way to inform the public about these spaces in order to increase their accessibility and improve their public usage. The unawareness surrounding these spaces has led to a diminishing condition at many of the sites. An increase in usage is beneficial for the public because it gives us back part of the city, but would also be beneficial for the maintenance of the site. Increased usage could help for increased maintenance, and would even benefit job creation. This is a call to action that aims to inspire the usage and encourage the spreading of information regarding POPS.

Technology is the catalyst for this proposal because of its ability to reach a wide range of people and also because of its astounding impact on the public. Many aspects will have to be considered when implementing this plan, and most of them deal with the answering of basic questions of who, what, and why? Two immediate suggestions will be given that serve as a more immediate response, but also lend themselves to a number of possibilities for future developments.

Thanks to iPad and Kindle devices, even our books have become a part of a digital library that we can carry across the city in our pockets. They are convenient advancements that could assist our cause because if you are trying to find a place to sit in the city, you are probably not going to venture to the nearest library to find a book that would tell you where these spaces are located. There are a variety of applications that we use on the daily that help us find restaurants, movie theater show times, and tell us the most up-to-date weather reports, so why not an app that organizes and directs us to the closest POPS?

A mobile application would increase exposure of these spaces and spread information regarding the spaces to a massive amount of people while simultaneously making the information more readily accessible. The initial app would simply transform Kayden’s book into a handheld application that breaks down the neighborhoods and shows all the POPS in New York City. It would allow you to click on a specific space on the map to find out more about the individual space and would provide basic info like neighborhood and address. The app could go further by describing the basic space itself as well as the surrounding amenities. This would be a sufficient start, but in the future, perhaps this application could function more like the Urban Spoon app, which uses GPS and helps one find a restaurant based on location as well as by food preference and desired price range. The POPS app could enable GPS to inform the user of surrounding POPS based on their current positioning, and it could also break down the spaces by amenities such as seating, plant life, or waterfronts. It could inform the public if this is space is part of an office building, a residence, or whether it is an interior or exterior space. This app would provide the public with everything they might want to know or need to know about the POPS and hopefully work towards the encouragement of the public to better use the space. However, an application alone will not do the trick, because what is the point if you do not know these spaces exist, and in turn, do not know that the app exists?

I think the second move in the technology application would be to invoke social media sites such as Facebook, and why not? It has taken over a part of our day-to-day lives and social media sites act as tools for marketing and as devices that can help a single message reach a large group of people. As a college student and Facebook advocate, I can not remember a day in the past year when I did not check my profile and catch up with what friends were doing. I imagine people, and not just students, all over New York can say the same. So, why not extend these media sites to cover POPS by giving each space its own Facebook page? People would certainly see them, and the ability to ‘share’ on Facebook would be key to getting a lot of eyes on the individual pages. The beauty of Facebook is the ability to share a variety of information with the world, and unlike Kayden’s book, it can constantly be changed and updated to include current and the most up-to-date information. For example, if something special is going on in an area near a POPS, it can be posted on Facebook instantly alert the public of the beauty. Pictures can be shared and website links posted, events can be created and people can be digitally invited to attend an event not otherwise made available. Questions could be asked and answered regarding the space, and constantly updated statuses could work to inform the public on daily happenings at the spaces.

Having the spaces as a constant fixture on Facebook is a way to increase accessibility and public comfort towards the POPS by the visitor because the public would become more familiar with, and would probably become more inclined to visit, the POPS. Making the page is the first step, but the maintenance of the site is now in question.

The question of ‘who’ is probably the most important surrounding this proposal. Whose role is it to make the social media profile page? Certainly someone would have to manage the site on a daily basis or the creation of the page would be a moot point. In another piece by Jerold Kayden that was featured in The New York Times, “Meet Me at the Plaza,” he suggests the usage of a curator for the POPS who “actively promotes their use, not only by ensuring that spaces are provided as legally promised but also by encouraging improvements, activities and public educational opportunities.” Have we found our champion? This suggested curator could function more as a digital curator, whose role focuses on getting the word out about these spaces on the social media sites. It is a role that many people would have to

Continued on page 26
The problem with public housing isn’t that its buildings are filled with horrible, scary people...that they’re perceived to be that way.

What’s public about a housing system with a 100,000-person waiting list? That sentence is not meant to be the setup of a joke, but if it were, the residents of New York City’s public housing developments wouldn’t be in on it. The City is faced with crumbling infrastructure, a waiting list longer than the line at St. Peter’s Gate, a housing authority ready to turn development over to the private sector, and a public that has summarily ruled against a typology and group of people that it pays to support. Faced with such a big mess, architects and policymakers alike still haven’t decided on the iterations best suited to make public housing work. More importantly, it is unclear whether those in charge understand the role that perception, typology, and identifiability have played in the vilification of public housing. Ironically, society has transformed the public housing system into something anti-public, and how it got that way holds the answers to how to fix it.

Though laughable in its incredulity, as it stands, the state of public housing is still slightly more troubling than it is outrageous. So what should be done? As it turns out, attempting to answer my first question is a good start. What’s public about public housing in New York City? Not a whole lot. To get to this profound and exhaustive answer, I first tried to approach the question from the perspective of access. But even though everyone from Mexican ninjas to bisexual Taoist coalminders can make use of the system, statistically, 97% of those who do are either Black or Hispanic. Poor. Fair Housing laws have been put in place to protect against discrimination for all housing in the U.S. since 1974, so this access is not exclusive to public housing. In reality, only a limited number of people can make use of public housing due to income limits and waiting lists. Then, I thought that maybe public housing is public because of how it’s paid for, which made sense at first. But there is a fundamental separation between how something is financed and the thing itself. So while the public does foot the bill for public housing, not all taxpayers have a say in the specifics of how it is run or how their money is actually spent.

The more I’ve tried to piece together what could be considered public about public housing, the more I get a decidedly un-public feeling about it. Normally that would be cause for a name change and not much else. But a change to what? Can public housing be considered private? I don’t think so. The existence of private spaces and institutions implies active choice in making them exclusive. I actively want to be left alone to do bathroom things in my bathroom. Old Boys want to be left alone to do Old Boy things while drinking scotch—such is the way of the world. Somehow, the Projects don’t have the same feeling. Who would actively choose to reside in a housing system with over 300,000 outstanding maintenance requests? Only people who have no other choice. So, in its current state, public housing fills a societal need. It doesn’t facilitate choice, so it can’t really be considered private either.

The only wholly public aspect of public housing that I can gather comes from its physical form. If it’s out in the open, anyone with eyes can perceive form, making it inherently public by virtue of its visual availability. That’s pretty much all public housing is packing in the public department. So why is there such pervasive tension around an institution that so few people have physical access to—especially if people who lack need of it don’t want it? The answer, believe it or not, is precisely because we can see it.

Beyond seeing, the public recognizes the typology most associated with public housing. We almost always know a NYCHA development when we see one. Originally, the Tower in the Park typology that is so recognizable today was adopted as a forward-minded break from the slums of the 1930s. Modernism had its advantages then: it underscored the notion of progress, minimized costs, and represented a cleaner, safer way of life. At the same time, the size of the developments heavily concentrated and isolated residents, creating large zones of poverty. Those who didn’t live within the development didn’t need to interact with it. This socioeconomic isolation is a launching point for multigenerational poverty, crime, and an array of other social ills that continue today, along with the partner to those ills—stereotyping. What is less talked about is the identifiability that results from the same typology being associated with this underlying social condition and its ability to facilitate stereotyping. Public perception and the general public’s inability to interact with the Projects has led to its unwillingness to do so, as evidenced by the public opposition to development of large-scale public housing complexes on vacant land throughout the country, described by Rosie Tighe’s journal article on the public opinion of affordable housing. The trigger is perception and part of the cause is public housing’s lack of anonymity. The public has decided that the social dynamic within the Projects is not for them, and beyond that, they’ve decided that it is somehow separate from their existence. This otherization of a typology and the people living within it not only exacerbates the problem, but also totally goes against every iteration of the notion of public. Identifiability drives stereotyping, which manifests in the form of the anti-public.

If the public couldn’t identify public housing, would it solve these anti-public issues?

The next logical question is: If the public couldn’t identify public housing, would it solve these anti-public issues? I worked in the Bedford Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn just before gentrification began to take hold there. For years, I walked by the same building, admiring its exterior detail. I later found out that the building, the Alhambra, is a former schoolhouse that was renovated into low-income housing in 1997, after several years of neglect. Commercial establishments occupy the ground level. It took me several years to find out that this building housed low-income individuals, and I only found out because I wanted to live there myself. Other than its charming Neoclassical exterior, the building blends in completely. The permeability added by commercial space allows public interaction, and a rapport with the form that is not possible with the Towers in the Park typology. There are 46 units in the building, and you’d never know its socioeconomic makeup by its visual features.

Today’s photos of public housing paint the pictures and tell the stories that the buildings only reactivate in the minds of non-residents: the mod-
Diana, Altschul, and the Question of Participatory Architecture

Barnard’s Diana Center becomes a perfect example of the quintessential architectural practice dilemma: the discrepancy between the architect’s envisioned ideas and their actual performance once they’re put to the test with real users.

As an architecture and art history student in her junior year at Barnard, I have spent a considerable majority of my time on campus in the Diana, be it getting lunch, attending an art history recitation, or pulling an all-nighter for an architecture studio at the digital design lab. As much as I celebrate certain aspects of the building’s conceptual playfulness from an architect’s point of view, in terms of efficiency, much of it doesn’t work from a student’s point of view. “Is this elevator going down?” “No, it’s going up.” Since Day One at Barnard, I have found myself on either side of this dialogue numerous times because the elevator signs in the Diana are two circles confusingly laid out horizontally. In the midst of modernist glass and neon orange circles, the Diana becomes a perfect example of the quintessential architectural practice dilemma: the discrepancy between the architect’s envisioned ideas and their actual performance once they’re put to the test with real users. Over the course of two years, I have found myself cursing multiple times the impracticality of the staircases, because sometimes you just need to print your paper and run to class but guess what? You can’t, because that’ll take you even more time! Instead you’ll have to wait for the painfully slow elevator. Why do we have uncessarily cold air-conditioning in such a green building? Whoever designed the Diana (it was Weiss/Manfredi) clearly had no idea what it’s like to be a student!

At this point exactly, I stopped and asked, why didn’t they consider this student perspective? What happened to all the hype about the 21st century being the century of participation, interactive technology, and other communal stuff? Democracy is compromising the needs of different parties to achieve the fairest and beneficial goal for the majority, but is it always democratic when a third party, the architect, makes all the compromising in our place? When the Diana was first opened in 2010, it received a lot of attention both from school publications such as the Columbia Spectator and from established architecture journals such as Metropolis or Architect Magazine. What was common to all of their narratives was the way the building was imagined to re-vitalize Barnard’s sense of community through interdisciplinary programming and an unusual circulation scheme. Needless to say, making students walk horizontally across the building in a glass tunnel to take a single flight of stairs didn’t solve the age-old problem of the lack of community. But really, why did the Diana fail? My main point every time I complain about the Diana’s inefficiency to my friends is that it could’ve been avoided had the architects taken student input during their design process. Granted, participatory design is messy and is harder to negotiate the more parties there are present, but is it really impossible? Todd Rohue of Common Room and architecture professor at Barnard College says “The reason that it is difficult to have user input in a student center like the Diana is that on one end of the client side, you have administrators and a board of trustees who want the architect to take control and on the other hand you have students who want someone who would respond. The architects negotiate who their client is—you have to learn how to do it.” Negotiating the client is negotiating the architect’s ego. What participatory design proposes is to call into question this ego and look at it in new light since Ayn Rand triumphed Howard Roark’s individuality in Fountainhead sixty years ago. Should architects keep their usual positions as divine creators who demand a complete laissez-faire attitude from the client or should they perhaps step down from the pedestal and ask what the client thinks?

It is unfair both to the client and to the architect to treat the latter like a messiah and expect him to single-handedly solve every problem in the world through design. In the case of the Diana, it was a categorical mistake to set up an equation in which a single individual was trying to tackle the problem of a community. Then again, as a response to my argument that the Diana’s failure could’ve been avoided with student input, there is Altschul Atrium, the space right across from the Diana on Barnard’s campus which was the subject of a failed student project. Beginning in 2011, the school’s administration decided to repurpose the underutilized atrium as a student-designed social space and as an extension of the highly architectural Diana. To redesign the Altschul Atrium, they organized a workshop/competition for students in the spring of 2011 with Charles Curran, a graduate of Barnard/ Columbia’s architecture program and architect at the renowned studio Diller+Atkins. In the end, despite the variety of the proposals, the administration wasn’t satisfied with what the program produced, so they asked Todd Rohue and two architecture students from the program to redesign the space over the summer. On a tight budget, the team created a bee hive concept that included additional wall space, carrels and octagonal ottomans that could be stacked or used as foot rests in addition to their function as chairs. When we had a group meeting there for a student organization last year, people immediately expressed their discomfort with the chairs (you sink into them when you sat for a long time). When asked about these chairs, Rohue said that the designers had heard about the complaints from students, but were surprised, since they had tested prototypes with students at Barnard residence halls.

The main difficulty Rohue’s team faced was that nobody from the “community” wanted to be involved with the space’s design or its programming afterwards. The school administration wanted the space to be used by the science department, but Rohue couldn’t find anyone from the sciences who was eager to give feedback. (One could additionally ask: did the science department want an exhibition space to begin with? Or was that an extraneous assumption from the top? I don’t know the answer) They also made efforts to meet with facilities, but that didn’t lead to a resolution either. Finally, the newly formed Student Curatorial Committee, of which I was co-chair at the time, got assigned the task of making use of the space by putting together a student art show, but that never happened either. On our end, it was mostly due to our lack of knowledge and expertise on curating and the fact that the call for artists wasn’t advertised enough in Barnard/ Columbia’s art communities. I remember suggesting to team up with Postcrypt Gallery, an established student-run gallery on Columbia’s campus, and being told that the Barnard administration wanted to make the project a “Barnard-only thing”. Today, it is still a heavily underutilized ghost-space, with a television and a football table.

When I was asking Rohue about the Altschul Atrium, he discussed it with great openness and self-criticality, specifically stating: “I’m not trying to find excuses. It was an experiment and if failed and that’s fine.” On one end in the Diana, we had the architects taking full reign in the design process and on the other end, we had students designing their own space, and they both failed to create the fantasized Greek agora-like space where students organically convene and there’s circulation. In the case of a student center, we know that a board of trustees with expectations, students with habits and an administration with demands will be defaults in any equation. The question of rightfully integrating the general public to the design process to enhance community then, remains unresolved.

Before I interviewed Todd Rohue on the subject of participatory architecture, I was imagining that he would lay out a beautifully configured step-by-step design process formula that would embody all the answers for community involvement. Needless to say, my naive superflicial approach wasn’t that different from the administrators who had believed that one architecture firm could cure an issue as complex as Barnard’s lack of community. Of his own practice, Rohue says “We don’t have a style or a preconceived idea. We recognize that we really don’t know. My practice is ten years old. Saying you don’t know is self-defeating and probably not what the client wants to hear.”

Continued on page 27
The significance of the view is something one is not accustomed to attach importance to.

What does it mean for a monument to be public? Monuments exist in space and in books, which loosely stand for cultural, intellectual, and ideological frameworks, as well as denoting a purely educational value. If we prioritize the educational value of monuments (and we must), we need to make them accessible in both mediums, meaning that presentation of monuments in thought must not be framed by attitudes and ideologies that go against their educational aspect. Given the monuments physical existence in space, framing of some sort is inevitable, and use by anything other than private individuals, i.e. groups or persons with a public personality and agenda, inevitably adds another layer of context. Our responsibility lies in contemplating the surroundings to provide a frame for the relationship between the monument and those surroundings that promotes the educational value, to counter other frames that diminish a monuments worth. How this relationship is presented and to a certain degree modified or rejected is an act of curation that has far reaching consequences.

When searching for an image of the Acropolis online, most results will resemble something like this: the ancient hill, detached from its surroundings by a green mass. Climb up, take a photo of the Parthenon framed against the sky, and you are immediately transported to another time. These buildings never cease to provide a powerful connection to the formative past of western civilization. Preserving such a site means maintaining an educational bank for generations to come.

When, however, you inevitably turn around, the view you are confronted with becomes harder to digest. The urban sprawl extending in every direction is hard to grasp in terms of historical and cultural significance, being impossible to neatly analyze and categorize across the pages of a textbook. You are reminded that history is not a series of moments frozen in time but a continuum; the Acropolis, although the product of such a moment, continues to bear witness to the developments below.

The significance of the view is something one is not accustomed to attach importance to. Despite the age of the Acropolis, the modern city of Athens is much newer than many other European capitals. It was a deserted and half-deestroyed village until its establishment as the capital of the newly founded Hellenic Republic in 1834. Arguably, given the profound gap between Pericles’ Acropolis and modern day Athens, the city should yield to the monument and the visitor should be allowed to appreciate its historical significance within its purely ancient setting.

It is however too late to relocate the city’s downtown away from the historical center and thus impossible to dismiss the city from the understanding of a site, which can no longer be purely archaeological. Wear and tear is a part of the ancient structures’ history. This second layer of history is inextricably linked to the modern city but no longer of purely academic interest – it is also political. This politicization becomes a secondary frame for the site, and the conflict between archaeological and political framing raises the issue of symbolic accessibility to the monument by different groups.

It is pertinent here to define our understanding of monuments and how the notion of “public” enters the definition. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) defines monuments as a subcategory of “cultural heritage”. According to them, this means works of architecture, sculpture, and painting “of outstanding universal value from the point of view of history, art or science.” World Heritage is distinguished by its universal application to all peoples of all territories. Given this definition and the international quality of ownership (understood not as legal but as a cultural, historical, and aesthetic entitlement to monuments), the inclusion of the Acropolis into discourses of identity should be denied to none. This, along with the fact that the site is open to visitors, delineates the public nature of the monument.

Nevertheless the political framing currently enveloping the Acropolis goes beyond that. Efforts to create a national identity to help drive the formation of a modern state out of a fragmented, provincial Greece during the 19th century encouraged misappropriation, erroneously combining ancient Hellenic and Modern Greek into one master-civilization. Thus the sentiment surrounding the Acropolis is nationalistic, implying that any kind of association of city/ country with monument is exclusive. Although not limiting the monument’s physical accessibility, the nationalistic frame uses the advantage of geographical proximity to claim the site by turning the “our” into the “not yours.” From this moment, although the site remains open to the public, its accessibility as an educational resource diminishes, with “book burnings” and nationalist myth making that handicap the intellectual development of generations upon generations, especially within the country, and with the reduction of the monument’s aesthetic by its association with national aggressive pride and possessiveness.

Hence the aesthetics with which the public approaches the monument have to be very conscientious. In the images above, the ideals expressed by the flags are different, but the act of symbolic appropriation follows the same principle: the group appropriates the site, claims the cultural production associated with it as its own and uses its symbolic importance to justify its cultural superiority, with the negative consequences humanity has repeatedly experienced.

One might argue that the Greek flag is a different story, given that the monument is currently situated on Greek territory. I would argue that exactly because of that proximity the Greek flag is less innocent, since the boundary to nationalism can be overstepped with much more ease. The 6.97% of the popular vote accumulated by the Golden Dawn Neo-Nazi party is indicative of the all too real dangers involved.

What about groups using it momentarily to make a statement? It is hard to tell whether this group uses the Acropolis for its meaning or simply its visibility. Either way, considering the Parthenon’s function as a treasury for tax money drained out of subject-states to the Athenian hegemony, the use of this monument to back the CP’s plight is rather comical. The success of any symbolic device is certainly doubtful, and whether a commentary was intentional or not, the climb uphill was intended as a provocation, aiming to infuriate enemies with the occupation of a site of such collective importance. Aside from the obvious fact that the Acropolis would have been impossible to visit on that day, the public nature of the monument is also undermined in that it is colored without paying heed to historical truth and thus opportunistically dismissing its cultural value, in a way reminiscent of the previous example.

With regard to more peaceful temporary appropriations of the site, consider this instance: A pop singer gets exclusive access to the restricted part of the site (for damage prevention purposes). She uses it for the promotion of herself as an individual: she does not involve the site in any discourse that aims at furthering the intellectual development of mankind, but shifts it to the background to frame her photo-shoot. The discrepancy of cultural value between the exhibits framing and framed is rather hubristic. More importantly, does that discrepancy affect the public nature of the monument? For one thing such commodification of the monument occurs at the expense of all the people that consider it their heritage. Conversely, the following procession is a modern custom yet in tune with the ideals of the times that inspired it. It is performed not to promote the participants’ personal professional development but recalls certain aspects of the civilization that are still considered relevant today. The monument acts as a referential frame, its richness not in any way flattened.

What then about the modern city itself? Beyond the history it encapsulates, the Acropolis is, was, and will be Athens. The distinction is important because Athens has genuinely progressed through time with the Acropolis, forging perhaps the most spontaneous relationships. The hill is where one come to contemplate Athens, forever the acro-polis, and although its structures refer to another time, the site is scale-less in space and time. Should this aspect be denied, the dichotomy between the monument and its location would diminish its value as a public site.

Bernard Tschumi seems to concur judging by his design for the Acropolis Museum. The museum opens up to the city from every gallery and the third floor in particular, which contains the frieze, has been done in the Parthenon’s image. The visitor has only to use the exhibition’s orientation and set up to look across and locate an exhibit on the original structure.

The fact that the Acropolis artifacts have been lowered into the city creates

Continued on page 27
ON TRACK TO SAVE THE PLANET

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Using public transportation means 400 million fewer pounds of soot, carbon monoxide, hydrocarbons, and other toxic substances released each year into the city’s air.

Every morning I wake up, have breakfast and get ready for school. No matter how cold or rainy the day is, I always walk 4 blocks to get to the subway. As always the station is crammed. I make my way through until I’m standing (or sitting if I’m lucky enough) on the car. 1, 2, 3... 11 stops later I’m finally at my destination. That’s my routine and, like me, they’re another 1,063,819 people who go through this entire process daily.

The Metropolitan Transportation Authority is North America’s largest transportation network, serving a population of 14.9 million people in the 5,000-square-mile area fanning out from New York City through Long Island, southeastern New York State, and Connecticut.

A couple of days before Halloween “The New York City subway system is 108 years old. It has never faced a disaster as devastating as what we experienced last night.”

a hurricane struck New York City resulting in significant damage. Two of the most problematic aspects for New Yorkers being power outages throughout the city and a stop to public transportation, which meant a real tragedy for the million people who ride the MTA every day. Myself included.

On Tuesday October 30th, as officials discovered the breadth of tunnel flooding, New Yorkers were warned that the bulk of the muscular subway network could be lost for “a good four or five days,” Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg said. What they found was an unprecedented assault: flooded tunnels, battered stations and switches and signals likely damaged.

“The New York City subway system is 108 years old,” Joseph J. Lhota, the chairman of the MTA, said. “It has never faced a disaster as devastating as what we experienced last night.”

New Yorkers are so used to using public transportation every day that they don’t see the importance of it anymore. Nobody was conscious of its true value until a couple of weeks ago when people weren’t able to use public transportation for a couple of days and everyone started freaking out because they didn’t know what to do in order to get to their destination.

Public transportation is as essential to the city, as breathing is to us. The Empire State Building and Central Park are a big part of what defines New York’s majesty, but the city’s 108-year-old subway system is what makes it function, with more than 600 miles of tracks connecting Brooklyn to the Bronx and everything in between.

Anyone who wants to get anywhere — whether it’s Coney Island or Wall Street, grandma’s house or yoga class — rides the subway. Just last year, the system delivered 1.6 billion rides, an average of 5.3 million a day during the week, 3 million on Saturdays and 2.4 million on Sundays.

So after Hurricane Sandy, when the service went off, it was a nightmare. Even Governor Cuomo knew that shutting down the subway would be a disaster when he said: “The transportation system is the lifeblood of the New York City region, and suspending all service is not a step I take lightly.” but anyway he did because “keeping New Yorkers safe is the first priority.” During the time the subway remained closed there weren’t enough cabs, buses were full, people waited for more than an hour to get to their jobs or to school, the city was chaotic. Thankfully, it reopened faster than expected. Just three days and some of the lines where running again.

19, 465, 197 million people live in New York. Can you imagine the amount of cars and walking people there’d be without public transport? It sounds like a chaotic mess. According to the U.S. Census, fewer New Yorkers are driving and more are counting on trains and buses to get to work than at the beginning of the decade.

I don’t know the true reason why the number of people using the MTA services over this last decade has increased, but it doesn’t really matter what their motive is, which it could be either to save some money or hopefully because they have started to make conscience of how much they’ve been polluting with their cars everyday in their way to work.

Every day, each person who chooses to travel by bus or train contributes to a cleaner environment, in addition the fact that public transportation is a much faster way of getting to a destination than a private car. That translates into approximately 700,000 cars kept out of New York City’s central business district daily. It also means 400 million The subway system delivered 1.6 billion rides, an average of 5.3 million a day during the week, 3 million on Saturdays and 2.4 million on Sundays.

But, why is this so important? Throughout the past years many different natural disasters have been faced by many parts of the world such as Asia’s tsunami in 2004. Climate has changed radically in the last decade. What hurricane “Sandy” did to New York was something unexpected for the East Coast; the combination of severe wind, rain, flooding and snowstorms in a couple of weeks is something extremely rare.

Many variables affect the environment in order to create a big storm, so the huge size of Hurricane Sandy can be attributed to climate change. Global warming has caused more Arctic ice to melt during summer, for this reason the oceans have warmed, providing more energy for storms. All of these climate changes contribute to all sorts of extreme weather. That’s why a tropical storm like Sandy, becomes a hurricane and therefore a great danger for human kind.

Scientists have spent decades figuring out what is causing global warming to increase and one of the main causes are the greenhouse gases released into the atmosphere everyday, which we as humans are the ones responsible for emitting them. Most of the gases come from the combustion of fossil fuels in cars, factories and electricity production.

People should understand the importance of using the public transportation not only as a way of saving money, but as a way of helping the planet.
CURATING THE ENVELOPE

On a daily basis, we curate private space within the public realm we navigate, creating spatial displacement between the masses and ourselves.

You are driving into the city, car windows open, taking in the air. As the suburbs fall away behind you, you begin to feel the compression of the city and experience the late nineteenth century bourgeois anxiety of how to not be swallowed up by the masses. Crossing the bridge into the city, you roll up the car windows to insulate yourself from the cacophony of Gotham. By doing so, you have curated your own private space.

Architects design space and space is defined by boundaries. Just as our skin is the main boundary between our internal and external environment, the facade of a building is the boundary between the exterior (public) and the interior (private) defined as an envelope: a skin, if you will. In an article entitled “The Politics of the Envelope, Part II”, principle of Foreign Architects in London, Alejandro Zaera-Polo quotes social theorist David Harvey explaining that the envelope creates a “mechanism of spatial displacement”. On a daily basis we curate private space within the public realm we navigate, creating spatial displacement between the masses and ourselves. Think this is an odd idea? Imagine an invisible force field—a bubble-like structure that surrounds us to delineate, thus insulate us from our immediate surroundings, including the public. In what manner do we curate this individual space? What are the consequences of bursting the bubble and violating the envelope?

The Envelope

Zaera-Polo defines four categories of the envelope: flat-horizontal, spherical, flat-vertical, and vertical. The bubble of insulation we curate can be metaphonically equated with the spherical envelope. The dimensions are basically equivalent to each other just as the bubble we curate to house ourselves is. Ask a little kid to draw a bubble and they will most likely draw a transparent spherical shape. Zaera-Polo further describes the spherical envelope as containing “gradations of publicness (his emphasis) within”. The buildings that he defines as fitting in this category “gather a multiplicity of spaces such as city halls, courthouses, libraries, museums, etc”. These are spaces in which one moves back and forth between public and private space as they provide “a relaxed fit”.

To illustrate the dynamic of a building type that Zaera-Polo identifies as spherical, let us look at what may be a tangible example to most: the museum. One moves between large public spaces, like the entry hall of the Met to smaller galleries and then out to corridors that break the bubble of the smaller gallery and so forth. So, just how do we curate the envelope of quotidian space?

Quotidian Space

The observation of navigating one’s way through their day reveals a plethora of behaviors, technologies, materials, and spatial arrangements that serve as curatorial tools to create and maintain the insulation of the interior from the exterior. There are many tiers of what may be defined as public. Here are a few examples of how I believe we reduce public space to curate a more private realm, all the while, remaining alert and very much a part of the masses.

It is 7 am and a group of men are on the platform waiting for the train. A woman is walking through a crowded subway station. All are using their body language to curate a boundary of personal space. What I have identified as ‘the bubble’. They create a palpable aura, which serves to exclude even those in close proximity. Let’s follow the woman from her home (private realm) to the street (public realm). As she descends the stairwell into the subway, delineating the riders from the people remaining on the platform as well as the rest of the city.

One can make a reductive formula of this movement:

home ➔ Street ➔ Subway ➔ Subway car ➔ technology

Now, once inside the car, the curation to further reduction into the private realm falls back on the individual and the behavioral or technological tools they may have at the ready.

Curatorial Tools

Technology is another curatorial tool in our quest for private space. It can be considered one of Harvey’s mechanisms of spatial displacement. Let’s go back to the woman on the subway to illustrate this. The doors have closed and once seated she takes out her ear buds that are connected to the iPod in her pocket. By sticking them in her ears and pushing the play button she further isolates herself from the other riders in the car thus curating a further reduction of public into private space by the use of technology. In doing so she also recedes deeper into the envelope.

More than likely we have all had a person texting almost bump into us, acting as if she is alone on the street, her bubble provided by the technology of the mobile device. Just as reading a book or newspaper can be curatorial tools, electronic media provide the same. We can metaphorically bury our head in an iPad and read, shop, email, or play games to form an envelope of DO NOT DISTURB around us.

It should be noted here that the ‘relaxed fit’ of Zaera-Polo’s spherical envelope suits our quotidian curation as well. The bubble is also a relaxed fit; it can be easily popped and is not static, one moves in and out of it at will, and there are aspects of each realm within the other. The dynamic quality of this relaxed fit requires us to add to the aforementioned equation where it reflects this movement and so on.

Models of Behavior

This brings us to the nagging question. Why? Why are we compelled to curate this space for ourselves? Why, for instance, even though we are tired, will we not sit in the middle seat on the train? Why don’t we like it when someone does? I am a great violator of this unspoken taboo. I have had people roll their eyes at me, make strong HUMPH noises while relocating their briefcase and, although I have paid the same for my ticket they act like I am the one who is inconveniencing them by politely asking to sit for my hour plus ride home. What is the implication of me bursting the bubble? It’s not so much that we like our space and do not want to share it, but rather, that contemporary society does not allow us enough of it when in public and more pointedly; we have gotten used to the more solitary aspect of contemporary life.

We live in a more solitary-me world than we did in the mid to late twentieth century. Modern conveniences are such that we do not have to rely on community for our food and shelter. Through technology we can communicate with whole worlds, create avatars and live alter lives, date, watch our children’s plays…all without leaving our homes and without the assistance of others. This creates a society where everyone else is the Other and it is not that we feel compelled to protect ourselves from the masses per se, but that these technological tools are beginning to create a scenario in which the connection with a physical human being is becoming alien and uncomfortable to us. It is a relatively new social order. We do not take that middle seat because we know we are penetrating the envelope curated by another. Even if it is temporary, for after the train gets going and all are settled, a new order of private space in the public realm is curated.

As a commuter, I am all for curating private space and include myself in

Continued on page 27
Curation, continued from page 3

Although the subway system curates riders’ perception of New York City by contextualizing their surroundings, riders are also subject to the curatorial decisions enacted by urban authorities far prior to their encounter with urban anchors of activity. Understanding that use of the subway subjects riders an overlay of powers that augment their own perception will unsnarl the power hierarchies found in an urban context and create a more fluid urban order. Multiple layers of curatorial choices simultaneously engage and affect the travel experience of subway users and create a constant fluctuation of power between infrastructure and bureaucracy, theory and practice, perception and reality. These shifting forces of control reinforce that the perception of New York City from a subway rider is actually an appropriation of various curatorial decisions and their continual psychological intersections.

Bleish, continued from page 5
indexes of graffiti artists and crews are given) that may seem out of place given the improvised nature of the subject matter.

Despite this seeming contradiction, presenting the genre this way is in fact an interesting intervention. Similar to the way in which a greater understanding of "traditional" art can be gained in its relationship with other works—made more apparent through classification—organized graffiti operates in much the same way. Felisbet’s site is thus a perfectly clear representation of the way in which the boundary between the formality of high art and the formality of low art can be blurred. Through his curatorial efforts on @149st, Felisbet has brought a formerly absent formality to one of the most informal types of art, a process which has subsequently aided in graffiti’s transformation from a condemned art form to one deserving of admiration.

Graffiti has nevertheless remained an influential component of urban life and the ever-evolving world of art. It has retained its easily identifiable style, remains colorful and distinctive, and continues to infiltrate everyday components of urban life. Graffiti is an integral element of the urban fabric, bringing to the sometimes gray city a bit of color, and serves as a reminder of our own capacity to change our perceptions. What started out as vandalism transformed into public art worthy of admiration, a means of beautifying urban neighbor-

Humanizing, continued from page 13

Immigrants is the emotional appeal gained from addressing a smaller, more personal audience. As discussed in the article "To Print Pub or E-Pub? Tis NOT The Question!" it is both easier and more enjoyable to show your work to loved ones of older generations physically rather than digitally, especially if they live far away and are unacquainted with the medium. While the large audience one attracts using the internet may seem appealing from an economical point of view, it may not always provide the best emotional comfort; strangers are free to comment harsh critiques within seconds of your publication being uploaded. The speed of the digital can function as a double-edged sword, depriving one of the senses it neglects. Think of the thrill of walking your family through the exhibit you so ardently fought for without the fear of simultaneously being ostracized by strangers.

While many advocate for a middle-ground between analog and digital formats in the teaching and practice of art and architecture, I feel the future may in fact see a rethinking of the relationship between both mediums rather than setting for a mixture of their individual merits. The analog may have paved the way to the digital, but the digital must seek in the analog the human attributes it desperately lacks. Recent developments in technology give me faith that this fundamental craving is becoming apparent, such as the increased popularity in touch screen technology, with certain companies working on ways to simulate qualities such as texture. Though we may be intellectual beings we are primarily sentient animals; we are born as corporeal entities and learn the basics of life not just through audible and visual experience but also through tactile, olfactory, gustatory, and emotional understanding of our environment. To ignore the latter of these characteristics as we have been doing through our obsession with the digital will ultimately prove detrimental, and while not readily apparent will soon be made clear. The limitless may have seemed tempting in the past, but it may not be worthwhile after all.

There’s an App, continued from page 15

take on for all the various POPS, and at least nine curators would be necessary to cover all the sections of NYC. However, some areas such as Midtown have more POPS than the Upper West Side, and there is a need for more curators in this area. The question that could be posed is should each POPS have an individual curator? At this point maybe that could serve as a long-term goal, but the initial jump-off spot it probably is not necessary.

Who could jump into the roles of the POPS curators? It could be anyone with apt technological skills, who could manage the technology updates and act as a liaison between the private and public aspects. The digital curator could handle the organization and maintenance of the POPS on the tech side, but the private side of the POPS should be required to maintain its physical upkeep and aesthetic. The private and public are working together in these spaces, but the public space is a reflection on the private space, and it’s their responsibility to the public to uphold a clean and presentable standard in these spaces. The curator of the space would be the one holding the private owners accountable.

This proposition is not something that is going to happen overnight and its important to mention that this proposal could fail. With Facebook and digital applications, usage by the public would be able to be monitored through “likes” and application downloads, so we would at least be able to track the progress. Even with the potential to fail, it is important to take action to inform the public of the POPS existence and individual locations because these spaces are ours and we have rights to them and we want them back.

Public Housing, continued from page 17

ments out of the towers (which would house common areas) and into a system of tubes above. A manufacturing facility for resident workers floats between the proposed housing tubes and the existing towers. Farmland would replace asphalt playgrounds on the complex’s exterior.

The plan is a little wacky, but the integration of policy into the architecture is intriguing, and might actually work. Still, I believe that the concentration and lack of anonymity for the complex’s residents would ultimately lead to its stigmatization, especially given its lack of permeability. Given time, I’m fairly certain that I would be talking about how the Tubes on Top of Towers on the Farm
typology has to change.

The problem with public housing isn’t that its buildings are filled with horrible, scary people. The problem is that they’re perceived to be that way. I’m not just talking about changing typology. I’m talking about changing the embedded social process of classification as it relates to community. The good news is, those two aspects—perception and typology—are linked. We have to change the perception that leads to stereotypes and the anti-public. Effective policy and programs alongside these changes are important, but will not hold up without a change in perception. Change perception or change the typology through a change in perception. We can guess at which would be the harder fought battle, but a change in the identification of public housing can kill those two birds with one anonymous stone. How we as a society identify and classify public housing is a big deal.

Diana, continued from page 19

Perhaps, saying that you don’t know, as confidence-undermining as it sounds, actually levitates the sole responsibility of a project (for a community that he probably doesn’t even belong in) from the architect’s shoulders. Making the community directly responsible for their architecture puts different parties in dialogue with each other as opposed to allowing the architect to make assumptions in their place, even though they don’t necessarily make the right choices. Just as an example, the organization People Make Parks have been bringing together people from Manhattan’s underprivileged neighborhoods to collaborate with New York City Department of Parks & Recreation to design their playgrounds since 2002. In this example, the involvement of the community has been productive, and innovative. Why, then, would the relatively homogenous and educated community of Barnard fail to come up with similar results when involved in the design process of the Altshul Atrium? There is no easy way for participatory architecture, but it’s something worth doing further thinking about.

Monuments, continued from page 21

a dialog between the Acropolis and Athens, and contemplation of the artifacts through the modern city - and not a clinically isolated museum - adds to their value, as the viewer celebrates its continuing relevance and a-temporality.

Lastly, to answer growing fears of commercialization, unless a change in ownership and/or administration ended up excluding visitors (with high ticket pricing for example), then admittedly it would not immediately restrict public access. The answer ultimately depends on the visibility and aesthetics of the owner. Renting the Acropolis for private parties, for the same reasons as the Lopez photo-shoot, would be anti-public; renting for quality filming wouldn’t.

It is hard to imagine what kind of revenue such a site could generate otherwise. The profit generated by the Acropolis is spread among surrounding businesses catering to visitors’ needs. Since the money will continue to go to Athens, where does the monetary value lie? This question creates suspicions that prospective buyers would be meaning to ostentatiously exploit the monument; otherwise such an interest can hardly be explained.

In every instance discussed, the treatment of monuments translates as an attitude towards humanity, the heritage forming the cornerstone of civilization. Notions of boundaries and respect defined by aesthetics are not trivial, as they serve to protect peoples from conflict and abuse. Cultivating such sensitivities ensures that we never lose sight of the human element. Among the privileges thus protected is the concept of the public, facilitating the free interaction and communication of people and ideas, in the interest of successful human coexistence. In times of crisis and doubt such as these, these civilizational milestones increasingly command our attention.

Envelope, continued from page 25

all of these curatorial practices. There are times when I do not want to deal with the public but I need to navigate around in that realm. I may be tired or simply have work to do. However, the bigger picture here is that our sense of community is at stake. To not break the taboo on the middle seat on the train and offer it to a rider who may otherwise have to stand is rude. Just as to feel uncomfortable doing so isolates us from our comrades in commuting. It is rude to walk into someone on the street because you are texting. It is rude if the curatorial tool of music coming through your ear buds is so loud it violates another’s space. By curating the envelope of private space in the public realm we may be disconnecting ourselves from the ever-important human discourse that makes us feel a part of something. That allows an individual the connection to something greater than themselves-a community.