

# Critical Studies

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From  
Virgin Land  
to Disney World  
Nature and Its Discontents  
in the USA of  
Yesterday and Today

Edited by Bernd Herzogenrath

Tim Collins

## **Conversations in the Rust Belt**

Set in the context of Pittsburgh Pennsylvania, the former steel capital of the United States, this paper explores the potential for a renewed civic or democratic dialogue on a specific brownfield development site. This case study, illustrates a three-part philosophy of discursive democracy, restoration ecology and reconstructive post-modernism and its experimental application by an interdisciplinary group of artists and academics working from a research facility in the college of fine arts at Carnegie Mellon University. The project goal was to create a program of community engagement in the research, design and development of a new greenway, on an abandoned slag heap. The project team intent was to transcend the role of primary authorship, instead initiating a citizen discourse, and a creative engagement in the definition, form and function of post-industrial public space. The paper outlines the process and its means of empowerment. It then concludes with an exploration of diversity, as a synthesizing value essential to the discussion of post-modern nature, culture and the public space of cities.

We are artists. We are inquiry based practitioners.  
We act as agents of change, rather than primary authors.

With the end of the industrial era, cities and their citizens are becoming aware of the vast estates of empty lands (abandoned by industry) known as brownfields. Many of these properties have lain vacant for 30 years or more, and are commonly perceived (from a distance) as a dilapidated mix of industrial-culture detritus and “junk” nature. They function as a symbolic monument to what was lost, the nature of their opportunity, missing unless we change the way we see them. If we can change our point of view, this negative perception, these abandoned landscapes become the spatial impetus for a renewed urban-public life, with important spatial and discursive components.

The question of a renewed public life is directly connected to an emerging tension between expert knowledge and common or community knowledge in the context of democratic society. Recently, authors as diverse as sociologist Daniel Yankelovich (1999) and biologist Michael

Soule (1998) have pointed out the differences between the way experts and citizens learn and decide the major questions of the day. Each author argues that the experts marshal vast quantities of information prior to a careful, often quantitative analysis. The citizen process is more dialogic, based on prior history, personal ethics, and readily available information discussed within the context of family, friends and acquaintances. The expert relies on facts and inductive or deductive reasoning to make a decision. The public on the other hand “takes into account the facts as they understand them and process these within a framework of personal goals, moral values, and their sense of what is best for others as well as themselves.”

In the context of these preceding observations, I would like to present a brief outline of the fundamental guidelines which emerged as a team of artists, a lawyer, scientists, and designers set out to develop an experiment in post-industrial public space. As our project team honed their philosophy, process and skills, it became clear that there was a set of basics which would guide our experiment in public dialogue, and its broader intent of renewing post-industrial public life. The philosophy of our approach is pulled from philosophers, Habermas, Benhabib and artists and theorists, Beuys, Lacy, and Gablik. They emerged in discussions with the author, theorist and historian Kirk Savage:

- Create images and stories, reveal both the cause and effect of the industrial legacy.
- Create works that illuminate and explicate conflict and points of dynamic change.
- Produce new forms of critical discourse, provide access, voice and context.

In the following pages, I will outline the three-point philosophy of the project, provide an overview of the three-year program, then in conclusion discuss diversity as an aesthetic value, and the potential of brownfields to transform culture.

Perhaps the most striking opportunity noted for a large park is the valley of Nine Mile Run. Its long meadows of varying width would make ideal playfields; the stream, when it is freed from sewage, will be an attractive and interesting element in

the landscape; the wooded slopes on either side give ample opportunity for enjoyment of the forest, for shaded walks and cool resting places. Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. (64)

## INTRODUCTION

In 1997 a team of artists and an attorney gathered in the STUDIO for Creative Inquiry, a research facility in the College of Fine Arts at Carnegie Mellon. After a series of discussions and site-tours, we decided to propose to local economic development officials that a team of academics and design professionals become developers of the open space of a 240 acre brownfield. It was the only proposal that separated public space from private space. It was the only proposal that saw the site as an environmental asset. It was the only proposal that arrived without suitable financial backing.

### The Context

Nine Mile Run is a place named for a stream, in the former steel-industry city of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The Mile Run watershed and stream drains five municipalities, flowing through the wooded Frick park and then into an urban brownfield which dominates the bottom of the watershed. Nine Mile Run drains into the Monongahela river. It is nine miles from the Point in downtown Pittsburgh where the Monongahela and Allegheny Rivers join to form the Ohio River. A mountain of slag as much as 20 stories high surrounds and overshadows the creek. This flood plain, identified by Frederick Law Olmsted Jr., for a new city park in 1910, was instead purchased by the steel industry, roughly 240 acres were covered by slag dumped over a fifty year period. In 1993, Pittsburgh City Planning developed a conceptual plan for houses and open space on this mound of industrial by-product. The initial proposal called for a flat development site which would be achieved by burying what was left of the stream under 150 feet of slag. Plans to obliterate the stream and the valley were an outrage, even the steel industry couldn't legally accomplish.

The Nine Mile Run Greenway Project (NMR-GP) engaged cultural and aesthetic issues of post-industrial public space and ecology. The project team, directed by three artists, included a diverse group of professionals from academia and industry. The project had a partnership with local government, but retained its autonomy through external funding. Over the past three years, the STUDIO team endeavored to generate an informed public conversation regarding Nine Mile Run, a brownfield site in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania being developed into a mix of housing and public greenway. Brownfield development is routinely the domain of engineers, economists, and public policy analysts who work to solve isolated brownfield ‘problems.’ Alternatively, this artist-led team has defined the NMR brownfield development as a public space opportunity rather than a problem. Viewing brownfields as the legacy of the industrial revolution, a cultural event that effectively privatized America’s urban rivers, streams and estuaries, the team approaches the work as the cultural reclamation of public use, value and aesthetics. Our project, focused on 100 acres of public open space – ran in parallel (and at times crossed purposes) with a traditional development project. Up to 1000 new-urbanism style homes will emerge on the 140 acres of slag plateau above Nine Mile Run in the next ten years.

### **A THREE-POINT PHILOSOPHY**

Henri LeFevbre has said, “Each society and its related means of production creates a specific kind of physical space” (30). As Pittsburgh searches for a postindustrial vision, the question which begged to be asked was how would the spatial and discursive forms of post-industrial public space – be manifest in Pittsburgh? The NMR-GP conversation was primarily constructed around issues of public space, specifically public space within the context of a specific urban brownfield (Nine Mile Run) which is about to be developed by private interests. It has been our contention from the beginning of this process that urban brownfields or post-industrial sites are an important public space opportunity, particularly for rust belt cities like Pittsburgh. The question is can we view these properties in the context of a pre-industrial legacy of public access and natural value? Can we integrate economic benefit with public use and ecosystem function? Will we continue to accept the dichotomy of wilderness or zoo as the primary ‘spaces’ of natural

experience? Or, is there something new to consider at the place where the land meets the river and the soot of industry still stains the soil?

### **Integrated Ecosystem Restoration**

The unifying theory of the NMR-GP is reclamation as an integrated ecosystem restoration that embraces the complex goal of ‘nature’ in the context of contemporary urban culture. A recent issue of the *Society for Ecological Restoration* reflects this interdisciplinary complexity. “Restoration practices which hold firm to ecological fidelity and embrace social and cultural goals are much more likely to prosper and endure” (Higgs). A.D. Bradshaw, a noted restoration biologist, comments, “The primary goal of restoration is an aesthetic one — to restore the visible environmental quality of the area” (105). Bradshaw also outlines specific scientific methods for ecological restoration: soil-chemical balance, initial vegetative stability and long-term biodiversity. It is quite clear from the preceding statements that these scientific methods are operating within a set of cultural options. Do we identify the ‘original condition’ and return our brownfields to that standard? At Nine Mile Run, the question of original condition is answered by millions of tons of slag dumped upon a broad floodplain. We need to work within the community to identify a socially acceptable solution that is economic, aesthetically rich, and ecologically sound. We must define what nature means within the context of our urban community.

### **Reconstructive Post-Modern Art**

Another important theoretical foundation can be found in our artistic intent which is informed by evolving contemporary ideas of socially based art practice and the last 30 years of reclamation art. Our process is rooted in ideas of reconstructive postmodern practice. Gabelik states, “The attempt is to move the dominant model of humans in opposition to nature toward a more integrated aesthetic of interconnectedness, social responsibility, and ecological attunement” (22). This paradigm shift is also described in the context of evolving artistic media and expanding public practice, as new-genre, public-art. Suzanne Lacy clarifies this approach, “new-genre, public-art, is a visual art that uses both traditional and nontraditional media to

communicate and interact with a broad and diversified audience about issues directly relevant to their lives – is based on engagement” (19). The history of this work is rooted in some of the early ideas of ‘social sculpture’ developed by the German artist Joseph Beuys (1921-1986). “He sets out from the premise that although great and definitive signals have emerged from the traditional concept of art, the great majority of human beings have remained untouched by this signal quality. Social art, or social sculpture, Beuys believed, is art that sets out to encompass more than just physical material” (Stachelhaus 66). We need a foundation of social art, on which every individual experiences and recognizes himself as a creative being and as a participant in shaping and defining the world. Everyone is an artist.

Reclamation Art, is a term used in an electronic document examining “artworks proposed or constructed by contemporary artists as a means to reclaim landscapes that have been damaged by human activities” (Frost-Kumpf). This type of artwork goes back as far as the ‘60s when a significant number of artists moved outside their studios and galleries in a movement known as Earthwork. Initial work in the field, relative to reclamation art practice, was done by Robert Smithson who actively searched out industrial land users for collaboration on his projects which explored formal/sculptural reclamation solutions to strip mine sites, slag piles, etc.. Another important artist with a more ecologically integrated approach would be Allan Sonfist, who actively ‘reclaimed’ the native vegetation of New York City in a public park/art work begun in 1965. This “Time Landscape,” as it is known, is still flourishing at Houston and La Guardia Place in New York City. Numerous artists have followed this path of contemporary practice. Common names in the field include: Helen and Newton Harrison, Agnes Denes, Donna Henes, Hermann Prigan and Buster Simpson.

## **Democratic Discourse**

The final theoretical approach is defined as ‘Community Dialogue.’ Our process is based on the philosophy and ideals of democratic empowerment through discourse. We are a culture that has fractured the complex experiences and understanding of life into specific disciplines and independent specialties. (In other words, the quantitative evaluation of experts has taken precedence over the layman’s ability to use

experience and general qualitative analysis as a method of making decisions.) We have learned to leave our decisions in the hands of experts, yet at the same time we have learned to mistrust those experts depending on who is paying for their opinion. The NMR-GP team would argue that brownfield sites provide an ideal environment to ‘reclaim’ the individual’s role in the discursive public sphere. We need to reclaim our relationship to complex public issues.

Jürgen Habermas, author of a groundbreaking work on the historic evolution of the public sphere, suggests the autonomous self emerges and democracy is enabled by participation in the discursive context (public discussion). “Participation develops an individual’s capacities for practical reasoning, as well as the kind of mutual respect ... entailed in the very possibility of discourse” (Warren 172). This notion of autonomous self or ‘public man’ has been suggested by some theorists to be a psychological function of humanity increasingly lost to modern culture (Sennet). We developed a program that would provide context, method, and opportunity to explore the function of public discourse in relationship to Nine Mile Run. We saw this public discussion as an important precursor to the spatial development of a greenway and its goal of sustainable stewardship. To accomplish this, we needed to re-orient the position of the expert in relationship to the community. Our process was to enable interdisciplinary discussion, by which we clarified the issues and language that permeate the ‘expert’ discipline specific discussions. With this new public language (freed of jargon) we then devised a series of workshops, tours, and public discussions in which we manipulated the normal client-expert relationship. We tried to provide the information tools to help the public understand the complexity of the issues and then devised events where the experts and the public could interact on a design basis of shared interests.

I have outlined the nature of the urban brownfield opportunity. I have provided an overview of the theoretical foundation addressing the reclamation and development of sustainable public space through: restoration ecology, reconstructive postmodern art and finally, discursive public space. In this final section I will explore the challenges we faced as we began to apply the theories in a multi-year effort.

## THE PROGRAM

Our program addressed the perception and values of the Nine Mile Run brownfield property. Our goals were simple.

- Create opportunity for experience.
- Expand the intellectual content of the public realm, and the discourse on public space.
- Enable an alternative dialogue which provides access and a context in which to speak.
- Develop a community consensus-concept design as a result of that dialogue.
- Infuse the results of that consensus-design with sufficient power to move forward.

Nine Mile Run is a post-industrial landscape abandoned 25 years ago by the slag disposal industry. The experience of a dump is not an intimate one for the vast majority of the public. It is knowledge by proxy, a concept understood at a distance, a concept which maintains distance. Yet from a distance it was impossible to see the complex opportunity of the remnant stream channel, to see the diversity of plants which were starting to emerge from the slag. The process of restoration, begins with a walk – an intimate sensual experience, seeing the site with the eyes of an artist, a biologist, or an engineer begins the cultural process of restoration. Restoration will not occur in any landscape without care.

... the part of it looking different is that from a far away vista it looks real ugly to see the barren parts but when you get there and see the wildflowers coming up you think, 'WOW!' You know – those particular flowers are more valuable because they are so unusual. It is encouraging to see nature coming back despite what industry has done. (St. John 157)

The issue that brought the Nine Mile Run team together, was the early concept plan for the site which buried the stream and all vestiges of the valley. This proposal elicited a clear and concise reaction from each of the four initiating participants who had limited knowledge of the landscape in the area. My own reaction to this emerged from a personal-aesthetic interest in streams and intimate (though limited) knowledge of

that place and its landscape. Our voice (personal and oppositional at this point) at the public meeting was clear, our perception and position – delineated a strategic alternative based on a philosophic or moral position, on the value of regional landscape forms, and remnant hydrologic systems. This impassioned response resulted in the beginning of a dialogue with city planners, fellow academics and local non-government agencies. The result was a series of funding opportunities to study the site further, and develop a public dialogue on the meaning form and function of post-industrial landscape. The project evolved over three years.

Everyone working on the project realized that the best ideas languish if there is no advocacy and expert knowledge behind them. The questions that we needed to answer if we were to develop an empowered response were: One, could a group of academic-artists build a program of postindustrial change built upon emerging reconstructivist aesthetic principals? Two, would it be possible to develop an objective research approach to these emerging issues of the public realm that would satisfy the demands of our academic positions? Our final approach, outlined earlier in the context of Joseph Beuys's and recent theories of reconstructive post-modernism, could also be defined from an urban planning point of view. Leonie Sandercock defines a social learning and communicative action approach to planning:

The emphasis is less on what planners know, and more on how they use and distribute their knowledge; less on their ability to solve problems and more on opening up debate about them. In this model planning is about talk, argument and shaping attention. (175)

### **Year One, Ample Opportunity: The Community Dialogue**

With an understanding of the existing development program, we knew we had to have specific programmatic goals to engage the public in an alternative development dialogue, focusing on the potential form of this post-industrial public space, and its function within a social and ecological context.

- Create opportunity for experience.
- Expand the intellectual content of the public realm, and the discourse on public space.
- Enable an alternative dialogue which provides access and a context in which to speak.

To meet the stated goals, we developed a workshop program. Due to the conceptual complexity of the site, the workshops focused on four topics: history context and public policy, urban stream remediation, soil slag and habitat, and sustainable open space. Our audience was a diverse group of municipal officials, artists, architects, hikers, bikers, dog walkers, botanizers, birders, planners, environmentalists, community representatives and other stakeholders. The workshops followed a five step process:

- 1) Distribute a background document on the topic.
- 2) Conduct onsite tours with experts to explore the issues first hand.
- 3) Provide expert overviews of the issues and alternative approaches to the problem,
- 4) Conduct integrated professional/citizen community dialogues.
- 5) Analyze and represent citizen comment and expert comment with equal weight.

Each workshop was preceded by the publication of a short document identifying the opportunities, the issues and relevant stakeholder organizations. Presenters were prepared for the diversity of the audience and encouraged to keep professional jargon to a minimum. The workshops were convened onsite, on the slag heaps and in and along the stream. Shelter in the form of a trailer with sanitary facilities was provided as an onsite-classroom by Carnegie Mellon University, enabling us to accommodate groups of people at the site comfortably. Nearby, community centers were identified and ultimately utilized for more formal presentations and discussions after onsite events. A variety of experts, stakeholders and academics were engaged to expand the concepts which had defined and at the same time, confined the range of options for development of the site. National experts were engaged to delineate a wider scope of opportunities and describe innovative, state-of-the-art solutions that are functioning in other regions and nations. Local professionals and academics defined the historic values, emerging

issues, options and alternatives for the site. Given this substantial investment in human intellect, it would be easy to ignore the power of the landscape, the stream and its corridor. First hand experience of the place had an enormous effect on people as we collectively considered the common perceptions of the site as a dump and nature devoid of value. The transformation of this site from dump to a potentially valuable public space, occurred within the dual realms of information and experience.

An event was arranged for each of the four topic areas, featuring tours of the site by four or five experts (academic, professional and community) with an intimate knowledge of both the site and the nature of its opportunity. After a 1-2 hour walking tour, refreshments were served either onsite or at a nearby community center. The community dialogue events began with a professional overview, to clarify the issues at the site. The group then broke-out into community dialogue working teams. A team facilitator was placed at each table to maximize involvement from each of the stakeholders and to guide the process toward key points of agreement. Typically three to four tables were filled with 10-20 people discussing a specific issue from that day's topic. For instance, the second topic: Stream Remediation broke out into tables on Water Quality Regulation and Reality, Stream Ecology and Aesthetics, and finally, Stream Banks and Floodplains. At the end of the process, specific values and opportunities had begun to emerge, a clean stream was foremost on the list, with the social and biological connectivity a near second. On a north-south axis the park was a node between the large scale Monongahela River Valley (at the mouth of the stream running through the brownfield) and the Historic 600 acre park to the north. On an east-west axis were three different urban communities who sought recreational, pedestrian and bicycle access through the site, as well as connectivity to the Monongahela river.

The dialogue was intended to complicate the discourse of development, and create a space which would nurture creative citizen voices. We developed, distributed and organized, 1. interdisciplinary white papers on specific issues and opportunities, 2. community tours with access to local and national experts, 3. community dialogues where citizens worked with non-partisan professionals to identify values and target research in years two and three. Each of the dialogues was

recorded and analyzed for institutional/citizen relationships, diversity of participation, audience expansion, rates of return and long term participation. A final report on the values and issues identified during the dialogue was widely distributed.

## **Year Two, Ample Opportunity: The Ecology of a Brownfield**

The goals of the second year were specific, to build on the work of the first year, and follow through with expert studies to define the range of opportunities. We worked to develop an exhaustive biological and landscape ecology study. This study would provide: 1. a baseline upon which further work on the ecosystems and the infrastructure effecting them could be judged, and 2. the content for design alternatives in year three. These year's objectives, built upon the long term project goals, were:

- Expand the intellectual content of the public realm, and the discourse on public space.
- Enable an alternative dialogue which provides access and a context in which to speak.
- Develop a community consensus-concept design as a result of that dialogue.

A broad and diverse team was developed from Carnegie Mellon University, Pennsylvania State University, the University of Pittsburgh and the Carnegie Museum of Natural History. The team studied the site's social systems, history and infrastructure. Terrestrial systems such as landscape ecology, and biodiversity were studied. Aquatic systems from wetland function to stream geomorphology and an analysis of the water quality problems were conducted. The STUDIO artists who funded, developed the general scope of work and hired these academic specialists, worked to keep the team functioning in an interdisciplinary manner. The charge was simple, to generate a set of development alternatives which could be used by the community in subsequent years to make some final decisions on the conceptual design of the valley.

The period of expert analysis was not devoid of public process. Funding from the State Department of Conservation and Natural

Resources demanded an ongoing public program during the second year. As we studied the site, we set up mini-dialogue events. The core project team would begin these events with an overview of some of the decisions and direction provided in the first year. The experts from the various disciplines would then provide the latest findings and expert conclusions from the site. Community members helped the team weigh the value of the topics, sub-topics, and issues they were studying and identified the opportunities which held the most social import. Citizen comments were integrated into the report which resulted from this year's work. Each discipline had a chapter in the text, providing a rigorous overview of the nature and culture of this post-industrial landscape. Ecology and infrastructure were considered as components of the whole system. Community voice was primarily presented in a chapter on issues, concerns and constraints, then in a chapter on management options. This final chapter clearly stated a set of missions and goals, defined the range of meaning which accompanies an ecological restoration project and set some guiding principles for the last year's work. Community input was integrated throughout the text.

At the end of the second year, we had acted on the community consensus from the first year, providing expert studies which illustrated the exact nature of the opportunities and onsite constraints. The interdisciplinary design process with its focus on design alternatives proved stressful for the expert team. Language differences hampered the discussion, and design alternatives ran against the discipline specific best-solutions more common to expert culture and its practitioners. Each individual felt a need to define and control the discourse as we worked our way through the issues of each alternative. The fear, more explicit than implicit, was that, in their final presentation, the artists would not fully qualify the nature of each potential solution and the diverse issues which emerged from the competing disciplines. Ultimately, the discussions were good. They allowed each of us to work out our ideas in relationship to one another and begin to see the range of knowledge and the bias of each of these separate areas as we approached a final synthesis. More importantly, we all learned valuable communications skills which would serve the project team in its third and final year of work.

### **Year Three, Ample Opportunity: The Brownfield Transformation**

In the final year of the Nine Mile Run project, we had to develop the expert alternative into a set of effective communication tools, to inform community decision making. We needed to produce a series of images, texts and experiences which would allow us to achieve the first of the two goals of the final program. Concurrently, we needed to develop an institutional and economic plan which placed our alternatives in a realistic light, and provided the program with the inertia and support to move forward. The final year's effort can be summed up by the following goals.

- Develop a community consensus-concept design as a result of that dialogue.
- Infuse the results of that consensus-design with sufficient power to move forward.

Sidebar: In the third year of the project, the City of Pittsburgh began a dialogue with the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers regarding a new federal aquatic habitat restoration program to develop its first regional project at Nine Mile Run. This is a new direction for the Army Corp of Engineers, who more typically build dams, straighten rivers, and transform ecosystems into infrastructure.

We needed to present design alternatives to the community, finalize a design guideline and develop an economic and institutional plan. The core project team made a transition in this year, moving away from the academic collaborators in the sciences and towards consultants in the areas of integrated ecological restoration (a firm employing a range of experts): an urban planner and a public policy expert, a non-profit administrator and a planner, as well as a landscape architect who was adept at information design. Each of these collaborators were chosen for their ability to fold our process into the complex realities of public culture. We clearly understood that in this final year, we had to communicate our options to the community for final design. We also realized that the final design was not going to be worth the paper it was printed upon if we couldn't weight the program with the recognition and support from decision-makers, the local foundation community and a range of regulatory and institutional interests. We chose a downtown

non-profit gallery as the site of our final presentation and community dialogue. To provide a clear sense of this stage of the project, I will separate the exhibition/final dialogue program from the concurrent institutional and economic plan and discuss each aspect of the final year's program separately.

I will provide the actual press release from the exhibition/final dialogue. It clearly defines the range of materials developed for this final community dialogue, a multi-media exhibition entitled 'Conversations in the Rust Belt: Brownfields into Greenways.' The project was presented at the Wood Street Galleries in downtown Pittsburgh. This event, and its gallery context, allowed us to surround our "working audience" [the community members who had worked with the project for three years] as well as our desired audience of decision makers with a full range of semiotic tools addressing the post-industrial opportunity, challenge and context. The exhibition was laid out conceptually over two floors to illustrate, 1) the industrial history, and 2) the post-industrial present.

## **The Exhibition and Final Dialogue Program**

*PITTSBURGH – The Nine Mile Run Greenway Project Team exhibited Conversations in the Rust Belt: Brownfields into Greenways at the Wood Street Galleries from July 10 through August 15, 1999. Funded by a grant from the Howard Heinz Endowment, the Nine Mile Run Greenway Project Team was formed in 1996 to research the cultural issues and ecological opportunities pertaining to the public space at the Nine Mile Run development site. The work is a project of the STUDIO for Creative Inquiry, an interdisciplinary center in the College of Fine Arts. The STUDIO was founded in 1989 to support experimental work in the arts, particularly work which engages complex systems. The project team has worked closely with the Pittsburgh City Planning Office and the Pittsburgh Urban Redevelopment Authority.*

*Conversations in the Rust Belt at the Wood Street Galleries reflected the issues facing all cities emerging from heavy-industrial histories. The exhibit integrated images and texts of the changing industrial landscape using the public venue of the gallery as a site of public discussion and collective*

*design. It utilized one of the two floors of the gallery to give insight into the former the historical industrial era which produced the slag-filled site, and the other floor to present the struggle to define the post-industrial present. The industrial presentation included images from public and private archives throughout Western Pennsylvania. The post-industrial floor featured a slag garden and interactive video presentations designed to immerse the viewer in a community discussion. Complex ideas on the relationship of nature to culture and public to private were presented in multiple media. Multiple design options for the development of the greenway were also presented.*

*A final community workshop was held July 23-25 at Wood Street Galleries to develop consensus on the design guidelines for the greenway. Pittsburgh City Planning was a partner in the community workshop.*

We knew that this final program had to follow our programmatic plan of integrating information and experience. The exhibition displayed factual materials which could be used for a reasoned analysis by the viewer alongside more experiential products whose intent was more emotional than factual. The pleasurable experience of large scale photographs, spoken site narratives and video illustrated the humanistic relationships to the site. The context of this final effort was a well respected gallery in downtown Pittsburgh. Our business and planning team helped us choose this physical location. They used it for breakfast briefings, tours and meetings with the decisions makers who could make or break the project. The project and its final dialogue at the end of the months exhibition was presented to a diverse group of decision makers who would accept the offer of a meeting and a tour. It provided the team with an expanded dialogue, providing access to the halls of power who would ultimately decide to either embrace or ignore the consensus plan which would emerge from this exhibition and final community dialogue. Many of the institutional and individual decision makers either attended or sent someone to participate in the final consensus-design dialogue. This event was the beginning of the public phase of the Nine Mile Run institutional and economic plan. Previously this "business planning team" (named so as to differentiate them from the core project team), had spent three months working out relative costs of our design alternatives, identifying the institutions who might support the soon to emerge final community-

consensus concept plan, and the various funding mechanisms which might support the final design and ecosystem restoration of the work.

### **The Institutional and Economic Plan**

The purpose of the Institutional and Economic plan was to identify an implementation strategy for the Nine Mile Run Greenway Design Guidelines. The goal of the Nine Mile Run Greenway Project was the transformation of a distressed brownfield area centered below Frick Park into a green space with clean running streams. This project is an important model for addressing the decaying infrastructure and industrial waste that impact the ecological, economic and cultural viability of local communities. After three years of extensive community dialogue, intensive research by an interdisciplinary team of experts and the development of creative design alternatives, community participants reached consensus on the resultant Design Guidelines in December 1999. Recognizing that the Greenway serves both the human and biological communities of the watershed, the Guidelines reflect the range of functions that the Greenway currently serves or may serve in the future. These include:

- The Greenway carries storm water from the entire watershed to the Monongahela River
- The Greenway is the route of sewer pipes as well as combined sewer overflow.
- The Greenway has the potential of serving as a model for ecological restoration and transformation of an urban brownfield.
- The Greenway can serve as a place for enjoyment of a natural environment as well as a significant recreation, research and educational resource.
- The Greenway can provide content for a range of disciplines including ecology, biology and public policy.
- The greenway provides the East End of Pittsburgh with an important transportation linkage, eventually enabling a stream and riverside bicycle commute to downtown Pittsburgh.

The primary goal of an institutional structure is to be responsible for an integrated and comprehensive management program dealing with all environmental influences and benefits within the area. A secondary goal is to participate in the implementation of the Conceptual Design Guidelines. Responsibilities and geographical scope need to be confirmed in concert with the appropriate city agencies, the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy, and relevant community stakeholders. They can be initially outlined as:

- general administration
- integrated operation and maintenance
- research, education, cultural programming
- the installation of artworks which interpret natural systems.

Funds are needed for capital construction and management. Capital construction costs include engineering, design and construction. Management costs includes on-going administration, operation and maintenance of the Greenway and environmental education and cultural programming. It was recommended that a Watershed Alliance be formed immediately to keep the Design Guidelines in the forefront of the Frick Park planning agenda as well as the other parallel activities occurring in the area. It is also recommended that an ecological-corridor be managed as a unit. This area nominally contains: the 100 acre Nine Mile Run Greenway, the 150 acre Frick Woods Nature Reserve currently overseen by the Frick Environmental Center (FEC) and the stream corridor along Falls Ravine linking the two areas.

This process has begun:

1. On December 10, 1999 the Transition Committee was formed on a volunteer basis from the Nine Mile Run Greenway Steering Committee membership.
2. Funding was secured by the STUDIO for the logistics and development of the Watershed Alliance, and its relationship to the Integrated Management Plan.
3. Funding was secured by the City of Pittsburgh for development of the Integrated Management Plan.

Next steps in the process:

4. Develop a scope of work, which is agreeable to all parties.
5. Develop specific plans for a reconfigured Frick Environmental Center.

In this third year we faced the two fold task of developing a community consensus-concept design as well as the challenge of Infusing the results of that consensus-design with sufficient power to move forward. The project was one of four that swirled around the development site at the same time. Each has its own separate yet interconnected group of stakeholders and institutions.

- A Master Plan for four regional parks, which embraced Nine Mile Run.
- The Aquatic Habitat Restoration of Nine Mile Run conducted by the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers
- The Summerset housing development, planned to take place on both sides of Nine Mile Run.
- Remediation of the sanitary sewer problems that result in sewage in Nine Mile Run.

We needed to keep our balance and focus on the post-industrial form and function of an ecologically restored brownfield site. We also needed to be sure that each of the concurrent development projects included some form of representation for what had to become a citizen driven plan, as the STUDIO for Creative Inquiry began to step away from the project.

## CONCLUSION

Nine Mile Run has become a virus. It has instigated new ideas and concepts for everyone involved in the project and has led to new areas of inquiry for many members of the team. Our goal at Nine Mile Run was to enable an equitable public dialogue about brownfield nature and public space. We saw our work in terms of a community consensus process and a public policy discussion about the form and function of post-industrial public space, a discourse that was missing and continues to be an anomaly in the current program of local brownfield

development. To do this we had to seek support from the specific municipal agencies managing the current development program. At the same time, we needed to retain our objectivity as a separate autonomous entity, achieved through the support of the Heinz Endowments. As we began to clarify our role, we began to realize that we were revealing a complex aesthetic based on discourse, restoration ecology and sustainable landscape systems. As we thought these issues through it became clear that Nine Mile Run was a better site for experimentation and modeling new approaches to discourse and dialogue than we had originally expected. Nine Mile Run provided both the context and the subject for experimentation. Issues which arise from the reclamation, restoration or healing of this site (take your pick, each has its own relevance to brownfield development) enveloped diverse disciplines and areas of knowledge from engineering to ecology, social and political democracy as well as the arts. It was becoming increasingly clear through the examination of this single site, that our regional portfolio of vast-estates of land abandoned by industry had a curious potential to transform culture in unexpected ways.

I would like to suggest that the synthesizing value underpinning the potential of these artificial estates to transform culture (and in turn other like-properties) is diversity. Canadian Landscape Architect Michael Hough, makes an interesting statement about diversity in the context of abandoned urban properties.

If we make the not unreasonable assumption that diversity is ecologically and socially necessary to the health and quality of urban life, then we must question the values that have determined the image of nature in cities. A comparison between the plants and animals present in a regenerating vacant lot, and those present in a landscaped residential front yard, or city park, reveals that the vacant lot generally has far greater floral and faunal diversity than the lawn or city park, yet all efforts are directed toward nurturing the latter and suppressing the former. (8)

Hough's statement is line with what the artists on the Nine Mile Run team intuited and then discovered upon looking at the site carefully. It reinforces what the biologists working on the site learned through collection, analysis and comparison of the site. Indeed, Nine Mile Run

was more bio-diverse, than our largest state wilderness parks! But where does this perception of nature take us?

To achieve a sustainable program of post-industrial public space development, it is important to consider the meaning of diversity in each area of knowledge relevant to the Nine Mile Run program. Diverse ecological systems are known for their ability to withstand catastrophic change, fire, storms even willful human destruction. It is through the multiplicity of species, each uniquely adapted to niches within a complex of landscape diversity that a diverse system can sustain itself, under the effects of sudden change. Diverse social systems have a competitive edge as well. Civilizations have always thrived on trade routes, port towns and now in new international cities, where diverse cultures create a complex social-political ecology. New economy researcher Richard Florida of Carnegie Mellon University's Heinz School has presented diversity as a key component of the new economy. Florida is trying to explore the source of new ideas and their social settings. He has developed a hypothesis that new products and industries don't start in established institutions. Furthermore, the more economically successful a city is, the more likely it is to have a high amount of social diversity. There is also a curious global relationship between bio-diversity and cultural diversity.

... most biodiversity remaining on earth today occurs in areas where cultural diversity also persists. Of the nine countries in which 60 percent of the world's remaining 6500 languages are spoken, six of them are also centers of megadiversity for flora and fauna: Mexico, Brazil, Indonesia, India, Zaire, and Australia. (Nabhan 105)

There would seem to be a thread connecting biodiversity, cultural diversity and economic diversity. This is the thread of a complex and dynamic system that few of us will ever be able to recognize in detail, but I think that many of us are beginning to sense in pattern.

As an artist, the question that I struggle with is the following: Is it possible to consider an aesthetic of diversity? Eaton offers a definition with which to begin the search for an answer.

An aesthetic property is intrinsic; broadly speaking (by reference to what draws attention to an intrinsic property) anything aesthetically relevant can be construed as an aesthetic property. When one has an aesthetic experience, there are always intrinsic properties of the object of the experience that one can claim to be attending to and that one believes are at least a partial cause of the experiences. (Eaton 93)

The question of the formal element of a diverse system has not been widely addressed. Rachel and Stephen Kaplan are two of the most widely published experts on the psychology of human reactions to landscape. Their recent text *With People in Mind: Design and Management of Everyday Nature*, with landscape architect Robert L. Ryan, underlines the bias that managed landscapes have over what they deem 'wild' nature. Simply put, this is an issue of perceived control. Dense vegetation and obstructed views (a forest with a functioning understory) are perceived as obstructed landscapes, leading to fears of loss, confusion and in an urban setting potential hiding places for violent entities. The text clearly states the human preference for spaced trees and smooth grounds, for coherence and legibility with a hint of complexity and mystery. As I read this text, it is clear that an aesthetic of diversity is not immediately at hand. We are still on the Cartesian path, the public opinion of nature is defined by threat, discomfort and the need to control rather than nurture.

As I read my way through the various disciplines which attend restoration ecology, it seems clear to me that the role of the artist, as cultural worker (and a participant in the emerging scientific and cultural effort to restore and steward nature) is to seek new relationships to experience, to seek the properties which will define the perception of systems which provide the causal relationship in the experience of aesthetic diversity.

Systems theory evolved out of the enlightenment project of modernization, in which progress was defined through science and technology. Only a handful of writers have attempted to outline an aesthetic based on systems, fewer still have worked into the idea of diversity as a pattern, providing some indication as to relative systemic-

aesthetic value. In the 60s, Jack Burnham was writing in response to the minimalist and conceptualist era of art. He provides some guidance as we step into this realm of diversity and its relationships to systems:

In evaluating systems the artist is a perspectivist considering goals, boundaries, structure, input, output, and related activity inside and outside the system. ... [F]or systems, information in whatever form conveyed, becomes a viable aesthetic consideration. ... The scope of a systems aesthetic presumes that problems cannot be solved by a single technical solution, but must be attacked on a multileveled interdisciplinary basis. ... [I]n a systems context, invisibility, or invisible parts, share equal importance with things seen. (17-22)

Eaton's statement on aesthetic properties is appropriately broad, and provides an umbrella in which information and invisible parts can be considered with an equanimity. Burnham outlines an aesthetic where the components of systems are as much intellectual as physical. The question that isn't addressed however is, what is it that we look for in the sum of a systems parts which indicates aesthetic values? Is there a synthesizing cultural concept which lets each of us recognize values in a system, and process it within a range of individual post-modern values? Understanding the potential pitfalls of any sort of essentialist concept, I'll return to Eaton, for direction once again. "One learns more about the invisible things that make particular ecosystems healthy, landscape begins to look more or less healthy" (94). The relative health of an organism, of a system, even of a technological construct, is a concept which begins to transcend the issues of essentialist critique. In general we share the zeitgeist of the meaning. Of course there are numerous points of specific conflict in the application of the term, a well defined and contextualized statement provides a clear communication of the conceptual continuum in which health is being communicated. I would argue that diversity defines a healthy system. It is an intrinsic property of a healthy system, it is also a property which often requires training to recognize. I believe that an aesthetics of diversity is emerging, it is a theoretical view that can be identified and pursued, but not defined by an individual author. I would argue that the dynamic emergence of a general theory of diversity is a key component of an emerging post-modern culture which integrates nature with culture.

Art is not an arbitrary cultural complement to science but rather, stands in critical tension to it. When, for instance the cultural and human sciences are rightly accused of lack of spirit, this is almost always at the same time a lack of aesthetic discernment. (Adorno 231)

## A Challenge

The theoretical, physical and design analysis of urban open spaces are the traditional realm of urban planners, architects and real estate professionals. Each of these disciplines are shackled to the private realm of commercial development by vested interests. Municipal design professionals – the traditional guardians of the public realm – are equally affected by vested interests and/or conflicted politics of municipal government. It is our hypothesis that the public realm is in need of interventionist care. The visual arts with a history of value based creative-cultural inquiry are well equipped to take on this role. Any role in an arena complicated by capital and politics must be met with a sustained autonomy through careful funding. We must enable an advocacy that is free to raise questions, paid to voice alternatives and be willing to embrace conflict as a tool in the support of the goals of an expanded public realm. This calls for an independent, citizen-professional – a generalist with training in the techniques and concepts of creative inquiry, social-systems intervention and discursive democracy. The long term goal is to develop a cultural discourse which will

- expand the social and aesthetic interest in public space to the entire citizen body,
- re-awaken the skills and belief in empirical analysis and critical dialogue (versus professional analysis and pronouncement), and
- preach, teach and disseminate the notion that ‘everyone is an artist,’ thereby undermining the interim ‘profession’ which we must create to intervene and uncover the form and function of a post-industrial public realm.

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