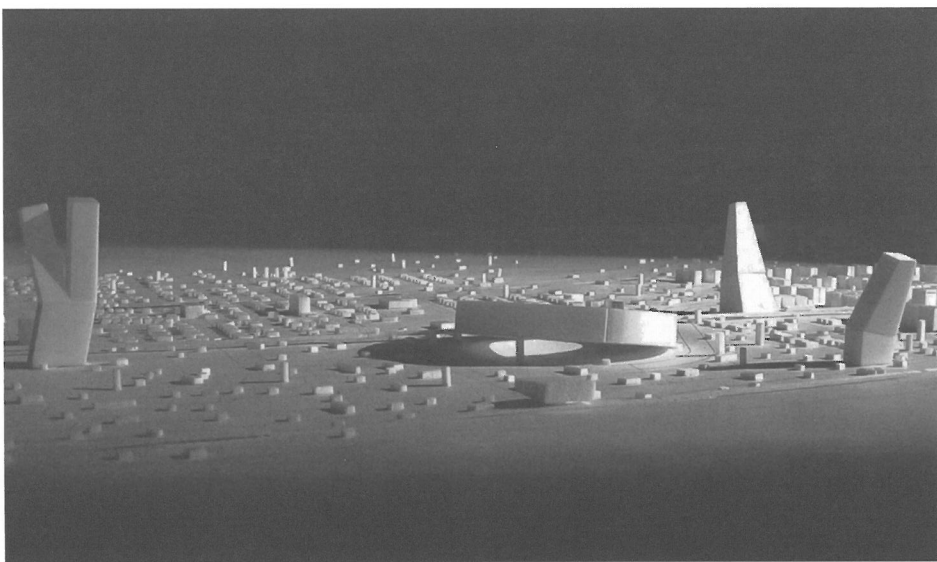


CASE



PROPOSAL

- 1** Stop all maintenance of roads no longer serving buildings.
- 2** Concentrate effort on essential infrastructure.
- 3** Render all site surface no longer served by roads to 'landscape'.
- 4** Install new pattern of 'soft roads' following the topo-lines of this landscape.
- 5** Develop sustainable housing clusters with limited infrastructural demands.



BUILDING ON THE REMAINS OF A BRAVE NEW WORLD

In the aftermath of the public housing experiments of the 1960's and the 1970's, the single-family house once again dominates American housing production. In less than 30 years, home ownership rates have risen from just over 50% to just under 70%. In 1999 1 million of the 1.4 million new homes built were single-family. However more significant than the increase in numbers is a change of venue: home ownership is no longer the exclusive product of outward urban flight. As government subsidies are redirected to assist low-income first time home buyers, the suburb returns to its point of departure, as if pulled back into the vacuum left behind in the wake of its own expansion. Increasingly the city itself is becoming the new frontier for the private house.

Formerly abandoned neighborhoods throughout New York City have reemerged as new locations for the construction of low-cost, factory-built homes. Countless infill operations, rarely larger than fifty housing units at a time, have usurped virtually all available City-owned vacant land. Their cumulative presence amounts to a radical new program: the de-urbanization of New York's three largest outer boroughs within the space of two decades.

Once the site of massive public housing efforts, Arverne's neighboring areas, Edgemere and Hammels, have already been redeveloped with thousands of two and three-story townhouses. Small alleyways between houses and shallow front lawns consumed by automobiles define the condition of the private villa degraded beyond recognition. Within the constraints of a volatile market, home ownership proves irresistible, even when the essential qualities associated with private property are all but suppressed.

If the *tabula rasa* is that condition which precedes a building boom, open surface readied in the face of impending development, then Arverne presents us with the opposite: a condition of implosion. Recent proposals show an increasing disinclination to rebuild the area as part of the city. (Densities have steadily decreased. The latest RFP issued by the New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development proposes a concentration of housing that by many European standards would not even qualify as urban.) In the case of Arverne the *tabula rasa* has turned in on itself. It is a classic dilemma: the longer the empty plane remains untarnished, the more we come to appreciate its aesthetics. Gradually, as time goes by, the urge to build fades into the background.

CASE attempts not to undo the present condition of the site, but rather to capitalize on its prevailing emptiness by injecting it with new meaning. Just as abandoned building structures are converted to new uses with minimum effort and interference, the remains of Arverne's urban fabric need to be endowed with a second life.



- 6** Propose single, double and quadruple-family houses that are self-sufficient vis a vis these infrastructures.
- 7** Invest the new financial balance to catalyze existing landscape.
- 8** Separate the purchase of the house from the purchase of the land.
- 9** Attribute collectivised forms of ownership with the ecological responsibilities the land is to perform.
- 0** Set aside building sites for larger public programs and collectivized housing types in the future.

Exactly a century ago it was the relocation of Arverne within New York City boundaries that sparked a decline, which continues to date. Today, amidst a spectacular natural setting, the image of a city on the retreat presents a compelling sense of relief! Could a conceptual break with the very idea of a return to the city hold the key to Arverne's recovery? Can Arverne be re-imagined as inhabited landscape?

CASE proposes a minimum series of interventions to allow Arverne to sustain the program and requirements of the RFP without sacrificing its newly earned status as landscape. Derelict streets and pavement not directly serving housing or essential services are left to further decay. A low housing density is established with minimal infrastructural demands, re-granting the private house its most essential feature: space! Alleviating the demands of the house upon its surroundings also substantially reduces the negative environmental impact so that distinctions between programmatic territories such as housing, park, recreation and nature sanctuary become less obligatory and, indeed, less obvious.

Once relieved of its classically urban obligations, one also becomes free to rethink Arverne's future as an economic and programmatic entity. New loyalties, dependencies and opportunities can be explored. No longer a peripheral urban area of NYC, subject to permanent misuse and neglect, Arverne can be envisioned as part of a ring of communities encircling Jamaica Bay. No longer a distant and forgotten quarter of a far away center, but, for instance, a respectable adjunct of Kennedy Airport, that other satellite on the brink of full emancipation, Arverne's future growth prospects realistically and exponentially expand.

CASE attempts to look beyond the short-term cycles of housing market expansion and contraction, which are the necessary preoccupations of market-rate developers. It therefore also assumes a local government with abundant patience, willingness for co-operation among diverse City agencies, and long-term public sector commitment to the area. Its interventions are not limited to the present, but rather phased over an extended time period of, say, twenty years. With Arverne, CASE imagines the possibility for inhabitation by seemingly contradictory forces: a rapid expansion of the Queens economy and the City's largest airport on the one hand, and the steady assertiveness of a resurfacing oceanfront ecosystem on the other.

Arverne is the last substantial open parcel of New York City-owned property to be developed. Thirty years of vacancy have returned it to an almost rural condition. Here piecemeal development, which thrives off an existing urban fabric, is no option. Arverne will be the first occasion where the prevailing model of townhouse development must be supported by a plausible urban ambition.

CASE
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