

Michael Bell Architecture, Marble/Fairbanks Architects, Mark Rakatansky Studio

C O L U M B I A

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PRINCIPLES FOR A NEW FIGURE GROUND:
NOT CIAM: NOT NEW URBANISM

The figure/ground of a contemporary city should be studied as an economic, policy and political structure rather than spatial construct. This new figure ground involves an increasingly stratified and often immobile class structure.

The liquidity of capital, having long ceased correlating itself to the cartographic description of a local territory, effectively unhinges a major portion of urban analysis from geometric description and from an analysis of mass, volume or shape, which are the historic tools of zoning and often social/political intervention. Space is still the tool of the architect but space is inculcated with non-material factors.

The GSAPP team examined the role of housing at the nexus of social, political and policy driven enterprises and the relation of these initiatives to those of architectural design, programming and the tectonic fabrication of construction. Architecture in this scenario situates itself on the agitated cusp of two intervals—the market philosophies of U.S. politics and the segregation of wealth evident on the Rockaway peninsula. Building becomes the resultant derivation of a high level of political strife generated on the economically conflated border of the first and third world U.S. populations. Building and the development process absorb and are defined by the ambient heat that accompanies thwarted attempts at border migration—it is an attempt to move from the third world to first and it is the catalytic reaction, the friction, of the first world's residence in the third. At Arverne this habitation on the edge of borders asks you to reconsider expected urban paradigms. Housing becomes a subject's attempt to see the city—to see the association and the arrangement of collective powers.

Stateless Architecture

The Arverne Urban Renewal Area on the Rockaway peninsula—a grand total area of 308 acres—was cleared in the late 1960's and subsequently left undeveloped, despite numerous proposals that have ranged from as many as 10,000 units of housing to a multimedia gaming park and hotel complex. The current Request for Proposals, which has considerable support for innovation and new housing design, is for the western sector of the site and totals approximately 100 acres with a target density of 8 units an acre. The RFP calls for the development of market-rate one and two-family houses. The site, currently owned by the City and the largest developable tract of land in New York City—is surrounded by one of the greatest concentrations of publicly assisted housing in New York. The Rockaway Peninsula is home to approximately 38,000 households; more than 13,000 of these households are in publicly funded and assisted buildings. The property is defined at its perimeter by three types of state and federally assisted housing. Ocean Village is on the east perimeter of the site at Beach 59th Street; it was built by the Urban Development Corporation between 1968 and 1974 and offers subsidized housing to lower income families. Arverne and Edgemere Houses, developed by the New York City Housing Authority, are to the north of the site; Hammels Houses, also a NYCHA project, is on the western perimeter of the site. The average income for families in NYCHA apartments is \$13,406 (as of January 1, 1999). Also on the western

TRIPLEX—WEST
Michael Bell Architecture



TRIPLEX—NORTH
Michael Bell Architecture

edge of the site are nine high-rise apartment slabs that were built as part of the Mitchell-Lama housing program; these cooperative apartments are owned by their residents.

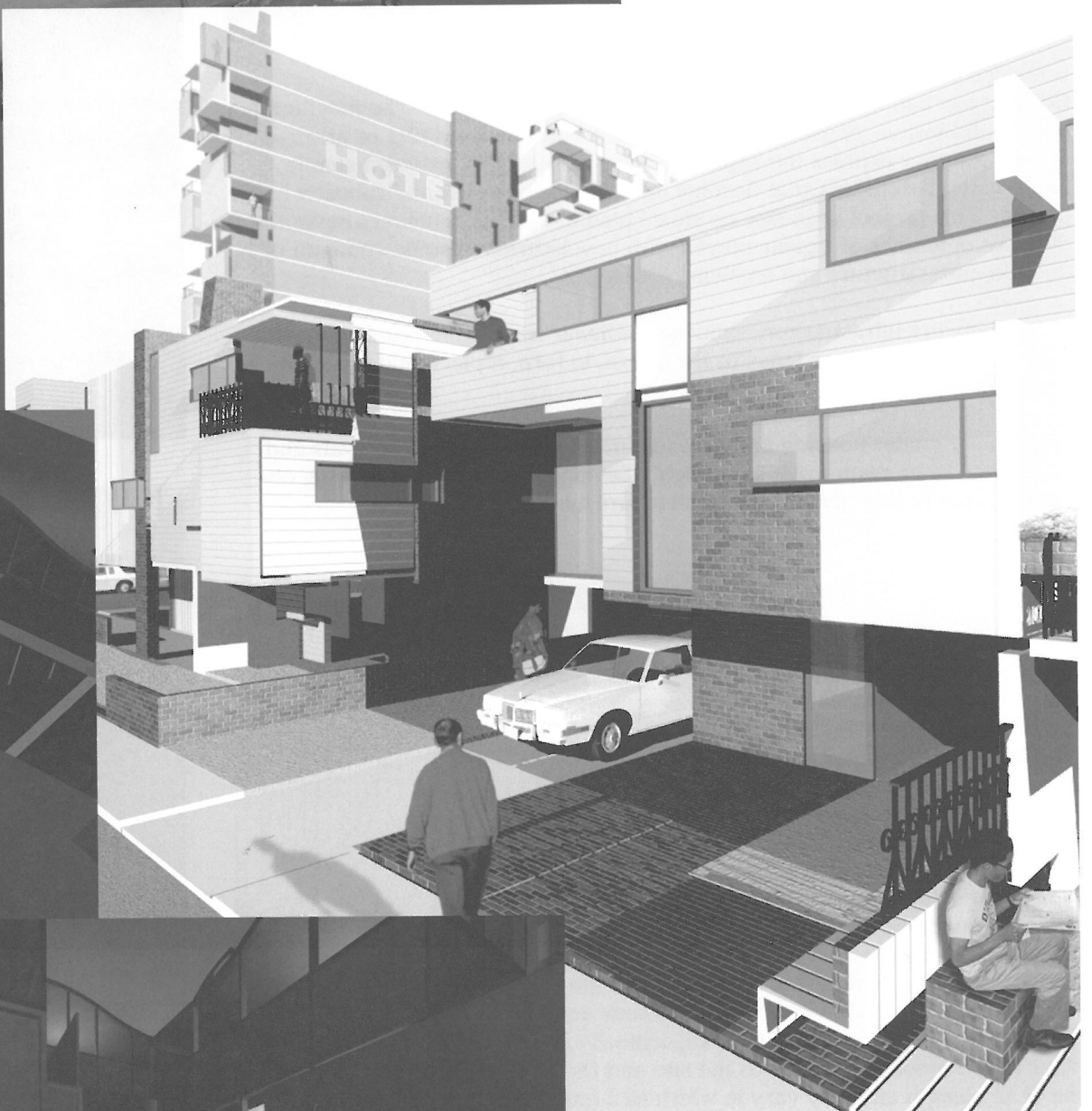
The city's Department of Housing Preservation and Development is in the position of hoping to eventually put itself out of the business of owning property or buildings altogether; the Department's goal is to distribute land assets held since the mid 1970's into public/private partnerships in a way that ultimately sublimates its own role in development by returning the land holdings to market forces. The HPD wishes to disappear.



AERIAL PLAN
Three teams of architectural design:
Left: Marble/Fairbanks Architects
Middle: Michael Bell Architecture
Right: Mark Rakatansky Studio



EXPANDED ROOFSCAPE
Marble/Fairbanks Architects



HOUSING TYPE
Mark Rakatansky Studio



GENERATING THE DOMESTIC INTERIOR
Marble/Fairbanks Architects

Arverne's oceanfront site and its environmental balance as a barrier island and peninsula serve as the catalysts that link the legal dimensions of urban renewal with the potentials of a study of the organic issues of the site's pre-legal history. New housing to be built at Arverne is in some sense striving to be literally stateless: while state support will be present, this support is folded into the general guise of market-rate housing. Unlike the housing that surrounds the site, this new housing will not reveal its subsidies.

Stateless Architecture, the GSAPP work here, has examined the federal, state and city policies at play and measured them against alternate local and temporal territorial means: the sky, the sea, the shifting sands and the ecologies. The new housing weaves between these realms: Mark Rakatansky Studio produces new housing from attributes of the slab housing and the older vernacular houses. The Marble Fairbanks housing as well as Michael

Bell types integrate the infrastructure of street, sidewalk and collective housing types with interwoven ground plans. The proportion of housing coverage to open landscape is as low as 25%.

The three architects who have collaborated here to produce new housing types for Arverne at Far Rockaway have each deployed architectural work as a quasi-autonomous practice—each team has designed housing—but at the core of each team's enterprise has been an attempt to deploy housing to interpret the city. Each team has made a willing nod to the authority of prevalent urban procedures that many would argue have outpaced architecture and planning's ability to build territory—technology, politics, social and economic realms have in some sense pre-constructed Arverne's relation to greater New York and to the world.