

The Conclusion of A Year's Work

If we are to analyze the value of *Ample Opportunity: A Community Dialogue*, we need to carefully consider our goals and intentions and find a way to evaluate the success of this year's project. In our philosophy section we outlined the theoretical foundation of our program on reclamation and sustainable public space: systems/restoration ecology, the ideals of reconstructive postmodern art and finally, discursive public space. Over the past year we developed a program that would allow us to apply the theories and experiment within the social and political context of Nine Mile Run. *Ample Opportunity: A Community Dialogue* was intended to inform the public about public space development on brownfield sites. Our process was primarily discursive in nature, although various ephemeral manifestations of art and restoration ecology permeate the onsite efforts, public tours and four events. As we attempt to analyze the work, the question we need to answer in its simplest form is, "How do we examine the value of a conversation?"

In the following pages we will discuss the four events and their products within the context of post-industrial reclamation practices. We broadly define reclamation as an integrated physical, cultural and ecological activity.

The *Ample Opportunity* 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. Many of these cities were built upon the resources of the natural world. Pittsburgh is physically located at the tip of a peninsula formed by two major river valleys. Economically it was an industrial city, weaned on resource extraction and the use of the rivers as part of the transport infrastructure that made industrial growth, expansion and its culminating forces possible. Resource extraction and the use of the urban environment as the "sink" for the wastes of industrial production¹ was typical of the industrial period. Ostensibly public space was utilized by private industry in the pursuit of profit.

Each society and its related means of production (in this case, extraction of resources and industrial production) creates a specific kind of physical space². The steel industry in Pittsburgh colonized our waterfronts (excluding public uses), transformed our rivers, filled the skies with smoke and the valleys with slag. This was an amazing and radical spatial transformation. The land along the rivers became the frame for a giant machine of industrial production. The water, the air,

¹Tarr, J., (1996) *The Search for the Ultimate Sink: Urban Pollution in Historical Perspective*. The University of Akron, Akron, Ohio. P. 7-30

²Lefebvre, H., (1974) *The Production of Space*. Translated by Nicholson-Smith, D. (1991) Blackwell Publishers, Malden Massachusetts. P. 30-33

even the people were the fluid in the system. The land once natural became technological, a system to be harnessed in the pursuit of profit. The economic benefits to the private realm overwhelmed the benefits to the public realm.

Today, we find ourselves immersed again in radical change. The question is, what kind of space that will be created. Industry is gone, riverfront properties lie vacant and once again we are deciding the relative value of the public realm. The technological purpose for the land has passed but the economic need is still viable. The question is how to 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?

The Ample Opportunity conversation has manifest itself in a number of forms. Texts have been created and distributed to over 600 individuals and families. Onsite tours with various professionals were arranged and a public access point was created in a trailer set up with the permission of the City of Pittsburgh. There were also public events where the professionals and academics who outlined the issues relevant to the development of public space entered into active dialogue with the citizenry. Our intention was to work from an opportunity-based assessment, to identify the brownfield as a place in its own right. We worked across disciplines to articulate its public value and, using a community dialogue-based program, creatively explore ways to sustain and nurture public value. Our goal was to enable an alternative public, a citizens group that recognized the opportunity of public space development of brownfields³.

Systems/restoration ecology

It is important to note that the rigorous assessment that informs an ecosystems analysis has not as yet been completed at Nine Mile Run. In July 1997, an initial assessment study began with funding from the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources River Conservation Program. The completed River Conservation Plan for Nine Mile Run will result in a series of recommendations and options for

³Collins, T., and Savage, K., (1998) *Brownfields as Places*. Public Works Management and Policy, Volume 2, Number 3. January 1998. P. 217-219



The Industrial River:
The mouth of the Nine Mile Run Valley, view from the Homestead High Level Bridge.



The ecosystem river:
The mouth of Nine Mile Run provides habitat for a wide variety of waterfowl.



A student attaches a plant description tag on Cow Parsnip



A plant description along the trail.

onsite restoration and project work.

With full realization of the lack of assessment data, we decided that we could use the four events and their attendant tours to expand the public's ideas of the ecological systems, opportunities and problems at Nine Mile Run. Numerous individuals saw the site primarily as a "dump." This perception is difficult to address, as both the development interests as well as some of the traditional environmental interests have a stake in retaining this perception. The development team wants the freedom to act as it sees fit, driven primarily by economically viable solutions and a clear understanding that a failed revegetation program would adversely affect the sale of homes. The traditional environmental organizations have an invested interest in the wilderness/zoo duality as the primary sites of environmental import. The ecological value of a post-industrial ecosystem is for many a step down from the backyard lawn and its birdfeeders. These are often professionals and organizations that have an economic and intellectual interest in assessing and protecting remnant pristine environments beyond the suburban core. While the STUDIO team would not argue the import of either of these views, we feel that there is room for an alternative voice at the table speaking in support of urban environment. The STUDIO team is interested in defining the image, meaning and method of a sustainable infrastructure of ecosystem function. The argument in favor of an ecosystem-based analysis of Nine Mile Run and other riparian brownfields can be found in the relationship between the vast body of potential urban users and the great estates of vacant brownfield properties which line our rivers for miles. If we are to teach ecology and respect for systemic function, it needs to permeate daily life, not be a lofty goal for properties seldom experienced and only accessible by automobile or airline.

If we were to encourage an eco-exploration of the site, we knew that it was important to begin to illustrate its complexity. Reiko Goto worked with Choli Lightfoot to identify numerous plants along the trails and to tag trees, bushes and wildflowers with their common name, Latin name, and common or historical use and/or value.

The Stream Remediation, Community Ecology and Sustainable Open Space workshops were designed to provide an increased awareness of the complexity of systems function (and disfunction) at Nine Mile Run. At the Stream Remediation workshop, we developed handbooks on benthic organisms (mud dwelling bugs) and riparian plants with Mary Kostalos of Chatham College's Rachel Carson Institute. Professor Kostalos led a streamside workshop on these organisms which are the building blocks of stream ecology. Without a foundation of benthic organisms, a stream is unable to support higher organisms. During the same event, John Schombert of the County Health Department led an upstream tour to explore the effects of municipal sewage on a city park and its attendant stream ecology. Tim Collins led a tour of the remnant riparian corridor between the slag slopes downstream. During the Community Dialogue roundtable on water regulation, citizens raised questions about the human ecosystem such as the neglect that plagues the sewer system resulting in a stream with a 90 year history of contamination and threats to human health, and the effects of the brownfield and its subsequent development on the remnant riparian ecology. Other roundtables

brainstormed physical solutions and volunteer projects to reclaim the relationship with and use of the property.

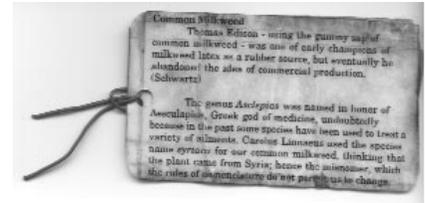
Community Ecology featured an advisory group that was prepared to explore the slag revegetation issues. John Oyler, a revegetation specialist, and John Buck, a soil scientist, led a tour from the plateaus into the valley. They explained the obvious constraints to growth as well as the not so obvious. They addressed moisture and temperature regimes, alkalinity and other issues effecting growth. They were also able to point out areas of growth that were fairly substantial and discuss the reasons behind this. Sue Thompson, a botanist with the Carnegie Museum of Natural History, took a group through the valley to look at the diverse vegetation and its function. At the Community Ecology workshop, the advisory team had organized a "science exhibit" type of event where individual community members could explore their issues and interests with individual professionals. At the ensuing roundtables, one group of citizens outlined approaches to teaching the complex ecological issues of brownfield restoration and the wonders of the site, from the herds of deer to the wild turkeys. Another table discussed designs that might enable public access and habitat function. The third table explored issues raised by the slag and geology of the area. This included a heated discussion about perceived toxicity.

Sustainable Open Space featured Jack Ahern, an internationally respected landscape architect, who has written extensively on greenway development and ecosystem function. Mr. Ahern provided an overview of the meaning of greenways and various approaches to assessing, planning and managing urban ecosystem function. At the final event, the roundtables were worktables with landscape architects Ahern, Larry Ridenour and Ken Tamminga capturing citizen ideas on maps, supported by the STUDIO project team. In these final roundtable discussions, citizens addressed a variety of issues from the community, cultural and educational organizations that surround the site to the problems and issues connected to restoring the stream and the slag slopes. A local foundation representative even challenged one table to devise some working projects that he might fund along the stream banks and into the watershed.

In our minds, the intent to inform and enable a discussion about ecological system function using tours and onsite communication tools was successfully achieved. The next step is to begin the actual analysis and identify options and alternatives for restoration and stabilization. This work will begin in 1998 with funding provided by the Heinz Endowments.

Art and reconstructive postmodernism

As a preface to the following paragraphs it is important to state that despite the fact that individual artists are taking responsibility for specific areas of the project, the effort is always integrated with the team. All planning is collective including advisors from various disciplines, and execution is a collaborative act by the core team. The core team consists of artists Bob Bingham, Tim Collins, Reiko Goto and environmentalist John Stephen⁴.



One of the tags, listing the history, common uses and habitat value of milkweed. (Milkweed is an important larva food plant for Monarch butterflies.)

⁴Trained as an environmental attorney, Mr. Stephen is a Pittsburgh native and founder of "Friends of the Riverfront." He is also a Nine Mile Run research fellow in the STUDIO for Creative Inquiry.



Reiko Goto, installation *Equation: (site 1)* A project for the Hewlett Gallery, Carnegie Mellon University, 1995



Equation: (site 2 Gallery)

The Nine Mile Run team would argue that art is about shifting values. If we look at the evolution of art since the days of American landscape painting, we see an evolution away from paint as a tool to replicate the world to an interest in the paint itself, from the psychological effects of fields of color to the physics of light and color. The value of painting shifted from its role in representing the world to its value as an essential part of the world; from the object of manipulation to the subject of manipulation. The work of the Nine Mile Run team reflects another shift in values. The artists are interested in the place itself as the object and subject of inquiry and manipulation. The subject is defined by a postmodern culture in pursuit of equity, access and increasingly viable cross-disciplinary process. While the art of the work at Nine Mile Run can be identified separately from the science, considering either outside of its social context ignores the systemic function and value of what is essentially a program developed and directed by artists. Fifty years of dumping slag in the lower watershed provide the artist with a site/place/context that is indelibly post-industrial. There is no chance of a physical reclamation of the historic condition. The "long meadows and wooded slopes" described by Olmsted in 1910 are well beyond our reach, buried beneath 50 years and 20 stories of slag. That leaves us with an opportunity to develop a reclamation program (an intervention in value and aesthetic) that is integrated with social and cultural goals⁵ while holding firm to sustainable ecosystem based process.

Art critic Suzi Gablik talks about reconstructive postmodernism as an art practice defined by a "more integrated aesthetic of interconnectedness, social responsibility, and ecological attunement."⁶ This evolution of the artists' role is a reaction and evolution from the modernist system of disparate professional disciplines involved in a mechanistic interpretation and analysis of nature. The artistic program of Ample Opportunity recognizes and accepts the reconstructive postmodern challenge. We attempt to delineate an artistic/aesthetic practice that recognizes the inter-connected systemic (ecological) value of all living things, while accepting the human context of sustainable urban culture.

The Nine Mile Run project team can point to various ephemeral components of Ample Opportunity that illustrate the art of reconstructive postmodernism. Nine Mile Run is in many ways defined by its post-industrial condition. Its value as a place has been subsumed by 20 stories of slag. Abandoned by a slag industry which was itself abandoned by the steel industry, this land has lost its systemic function. Joel Tarr describes the Nine Mile Run valley identified by Olmsted as the "Hetch Hetchy⁷ of Pittsburgh." By making this statement, Tarr begins the cultural transformation of place. He plants a seed, an idea about what was lost and what we stand to gain as we reconsider this land and its stream. To begin our program of Ample Opportunity, we realized that we needed to create opportunities for experience and discourse that would serve as seed ideas. These concepts would allow us to begin a discussion of the potential value of riparian brownfields using Nine Mile Run as a case study.

Our earliest work began in 1996. We began a series of tours of Nine Mile Run. We brought in soil scientists, botanists, wetlands scientists, ornithologists and geologists to lead public tours. We would

⁵Higgs, E., (1997) *What is Good Ecological Restoration?*, excerpts from an article originally published in the *Journal of Conservation Biology*, Society for Ecological Restoration News, vol. 10 No. 2-1997.

⁶Gablik, S., (1991) *The Reenchantment of Art*. Thames and Hudson, 500 Fifth Avenue, N.Y., N.Y..

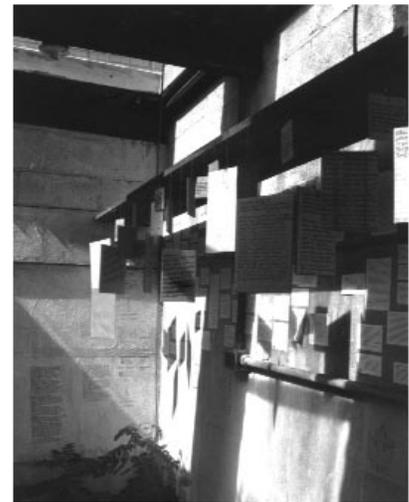
⁷Hetch Hetchy: The valley next door to Yosemite, which was drowned by a San Francisco City dam to create a water source. It was aggressively defended by John Muir but his pleas fell on deaf ears.

argue that the value of these tours was in line with the intent to create a program of reconstructive postmodern art. For one we needed to know the place better. We needed to seek post-industrial ecological attunement. Informed by postmodern practice, our role was not to interpret but to share and extend our opportunity for inquiry and discourse. Our goal was not to create a product, but instead a potential for aesthetic awareness, a shift in the way we collectively "see" the site. Arguably this approach builds on the groundbreaking work of Helen and Newton Harrison.⁸ Our goal is to reinterpret the Socratic method (which they use in their work) and its attendant teacher/student duality into an integrated community discourse, where the questioner-teacher and student are roles that are freely exchanged. In 1985, Robert Irwin described a contextual phenomenal art approach⁹ that provides a model for art that promotes aesthetic awareness.

The Heinz Endowments funding for Ample Opportunity allowed team members to spend more time onsite. As the rhetoric of development declared the site a dump, Reiko Goto began to discover a plant community of experiential richness. This evolved into a sustained creative inquiry which has informed an evolving scientific study of the area and may inform an approach to landscape/vegetation planning. Initial identification evolved into working with scientists to identify each and every species. Reiko decided to tag the plants along two separate trails. Paul Valéry¹⁰ has said, "Seeing is forgetting the name of the thing one sees." In the case of Nine Mile Run, we needed to forget the names "slag heap" and "slag dump" and begin to look and see the evolution of plants that have begun to reclaim the site. The tagging of individual plants along these post-industrial trails was intended as an intervention in the value and meaning of Nine Mile Run. It raises important questions about the rhetoric of development. It raises questions about the evolving complexity of ecosystem function on brownfield sites and about issues of value and focus within the environmental community. Modernist discipline-specific scientific analysis provides the basis for the development of ecosystem-based science. Postmodernism defines the constraints of a discipline that ignores its wider social context. The question we are trying to answer is, "How can we use aesthetic awareness (informed by scientific analysis) to shift contemporary cultural values?"

The creative (interdisciplinary) inquiry into the plant life of Nine Mile Run has provided an important and ongoing impetus for a series of works. These include, "Equation: Gallery - Art + a Greenhouse = Reclamation" a site/non-site¹¹ type exhibition developed through Carnegie Mellon's Hewlett Art Gallery, as well as a mini-exhibition of 100 year old pressed plants from the Nine Mile Run area¹², juxtaposed against an exhibition of fresh-cut NMR plants in water. This was developed in collaboration with Carnegie Museum of Natural History botanist, Sue Thompson for the Community and Ecology workshop at the Sarah Johnson Black Community Center in Swisshelm Park.

The trailer was an unexpected addition to the Ample Opportunity program. Artist Bob Bingham saw the need for an onsite access point for our inquiry, tours and events. He arranged to have Carnegie Mellon transport and equip a construction trailer as an onsite classroom. It was used through out the summer and fall as a resource center open every weekend from 9-1 on Saturdays and 12-4 on



Equation: (site 3 Greenhouse)

⁸Artists Helen and Newton Harrison created a discourse theory and ecological argument in 1970. They define their work within the process of the Socratic method. They spent most of the 70's involved in an inquiry on estuaries and lagoons, developing projects for the Salton Sea and the Sacramento River Delta. In the 80's they began to branch out into other ecological issues and ecosystem based planning projects. They are currently working on large projects in Europe. They are both professor emeritus at the University of California at San Diego.

⁹"...place the observer in context, at the crux (specific place) of the determining (art) process, insisting that he or she use all the same immediate cues the artist used in forming the art to form his or her operative- response." From *Being and Circumstance: Notes Toward a Conditional Art*, by Robert Irwin, published by Lapis Press, California.

¹⁰Paul Valéry (1871-1945) French poet, essayist and critic noted for his sensuous writing style Member of the Symbolist movement.

¹¹Site-Nonsite refers to a conceptual framework developed in 1969 by the artist, Robert Smithson. "The land or ground from the Site is placed in the art (Nonsite) rather than the art placed on the ground. The Nonsite is a container within another container-the room. The plot or yard outside is yet another container. Two-dimensional and three-dimensional things trade places with each other in the range of convergence. Large scale becomes small, small scale becomes large. The rules of this network of signs are discovered as you go along uncertain trails both mental (within the gallery) and physical (upon the site)". Hobbs, R., (1981) *Robert Smithson: Sculpture*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca N.Y..

¹²The Carnegie Museum of Natural History has numerous plants specimens from Nine Mile Run. A train stop at Duck Hollow provided 19th century botanists with easy access to the valley.



The NMR-Classroom/Community Resource Center arrives onsite!

Sundays. The trailer has a library of project documents for public perusal.

The trailer offered a site for both discourse and expression, attracting community members and professionals to stop by and inquire about the site. It gave us a location for meetings which would have previously occurred offsite. The trailer provided an anchor, a focus for creative inquiry, while at the same time it provided a visible symbol of the STUDIO's interest in the discussion of open space at Nine Mile Run. Our long term goal is to use the trailer as a site of public expression and a component of an interface system promoting community access to the evolving literature about the site, as well as opportunities to comment about the evolution and changes occurring onsite. The trailer is a key element of our creative process. Our goal of experimenting with the potential for aesthetic awareness, a shift in the way the site is perceived, was enabled by the trailer. We think of the trailer as a reconstructive postmodern artist's tool, allowing us to create experiences instead of products, concepts instead of things, relationships instead of audiences. Artists creating a context/place for intervention or symbolic statement are not unique. In 1974, Bonnie Sherk developed "The Farm"¹³ in a warehouse in San Francisco, creating a community art center that realigned zoning districts to form a new city park. Sherk's work explored an integrated approach to creative process informed by nature. Another interesting model to consider is the storefront turned into a participatory health care program by Chicago-based collective HaHa¹⁴, using hydroponic systems to grow vegetables and enable a community discourse around the health care issues that emanate from the AIDS crises.

The Nine Mile Run trailer provides shelter, public visibility, a threshold to introduce visitors to the site, a base of operations, and an anchor for our work. Bob Bingham began symbolic experiments with soil remediation products on the roof this winter, growing a significant crop of winter rye. We could compare this to Robert Smithson's "Partially Buried Woodshed" created in 1970 at Kent State University. Discovering an old wooden structure on campus, Smithson directed a contractor to:

*"pile twenty loads of earth onto the shed until its central beam cracked. The breaking of the beam was crucial to the piece, it symbolized entropy, a closed system which eventually deteriorates and starts to break apart and there's no way that you can really piece it back together again."*¹⁵

Smithson used the woodshed to explore the relationship between human culture and nature. The woodshed (cultural artifact) is considered order and nature is considered chaos. He used the natural materials (soil) to disrupt the orderly structure and begin the entropic process of nature. In comparison, Bingham reverses the process. Nature is considered orderly (ecosystem function) while the trailer and its post-industrial context is considered chaos (trailer and slag are both cultural products). Bingham uses the trailer to symbolically challenge the dominant perception of culture over nature.

The "art" of the trailer is evolving. We have only recently identified specific funding which will enable us to expand its use. The team is currently exploring ideas of public expression/creative discourse

¹³Lippard, I., (1983) *Overlay*, Pantheon Books, N.Y., N.Y., P. 232-234

¹⁴Jacob, M.J., Brenson, M., Olson, E. M., (1995) *Culture in Action*, Bay Press, Seattle Washington.

¹⁵Hobbs, R., (1981) *Robert Smithson: Sculpture*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca N.Y., P. 191

and ways to use the physical mass of the trailer to communicate and interface with our audience. We are discussing tools from wheat paste and chalkboards to telemetry and computer interface in an attempt to build a two-way communication and expression of the options at Nine Mile Run. We are also interested in expanding the temporary function of our community resource trailer into a center for stewardship and post-industrial education. Over the next year we will start a dialogue with various colleagues to develop concepts for an integrated social/structural design which focuses on expanding the ideas of sustainability.

Nine Mile Run has a 90 year history of water problems.¹⁶ Over the last seven months, a group of interdisciplinary academic advisors and municipal agency advisors have gathered to help identify the stream problems at Nine Mile Run. This process was initiated within the project team by artist Tim Collins and environmentalist John Stephen. The artists' role in the process is value specific. Poetic quotes were used to expand the context for viewing the stream. Electronic media was used to illustrate obvious problems that were the subject of controversial banter amongst the responsible parties. Mr. Collins worked for seven months collaborating on a water testing program with the County Health Department. In the process the artist has developed a complex understanding of the systemic function of the site and has learned to interpret the jargon of water issues. As an environmentalist, John Stephen provides the connections to various institutions, and enables the creative process through regional networking. The work on water issues initiated by the STUDIO builds on some of the recent work by artists like Mierle Laderman Ukeles¹⁷ and Hans Haacke¹⁸ who have both taken an interest in systemic infrastructure issues and the social perception of value.

The aesthetic/creative inquiry into water issues has informed an engineering study of the area and has precipitated a multi-disciplinary analysis of the riparian zone which is about to begin. The product of the

¹⁶"The stream when it is freed from sewage..." F.L. Olmsted Jr. 1910

¹⁷Mierle Laderman Ukeles, a "self appointed" artist in residence at the New York Department of Sanitation, has embraced the aesthetics of maintenance as her area of inquiry. She is currently involved in a variety of projects including the "public interface" for a waste transfer station in Manhattan, and various planning projects on landfill sites.

¹⁸Hans Haacke's early work concentrated on the systemic function of aquatic systems. In his later work he looks at the social and economic domain and its relationship to the product and context of art making. One of his most famous works involved an analysis of the property owned by the board of the Whitney Museum. The work often explores the discrepancy between public and private behaviors.



Fall 1997, Bob Bingham begins a discussion with soil scientist John Buck about "growing the trailer." They devise a light weight "designer" soil and run tests with cell containment systems.



Bob Bingham, *Growing The Trailer*, February 1998, a roof-top growth of green winter rye juxtaposed against the slag slopes of NMR.

Texts and quotes placed on sewer structures in NMR by Tim Collins for the Stream Remediation workshop.



In the dialectical theme of purity and impurity of water, the fundamental law of material imagination acts in both directions, guaranteeing the eminently active nature of the substance: one drop of pure water suffices to purify an ocean; one drop of impure water suffices to defile a universe.

Gaston Bachelard, in *Water and Dreams, An Essay on the Imagination of Matter*.



All the water that will ever be, is right now.

National Geographic special edition on water.

artists' work is integrated with the goal of social change through collaboration with the environmentalists. We are outlining a program that expands the artists' traditional role of critique into the realm of shared creative inquiry in the pursuit of resolving social and aesthetic ecological (systemic) inequities.

The Nine Mile Run property creates a relationship between Frick Park and the Monongahela River. It is the connection between the communities of Squirrel Hill and Swisshelm Park. A good part of its function will be defined by its trails that will provide access to our rivers. John Stephen has made a career of creating links between places in Pittsburgh. Arguably, the work could be interpreted in the realm of ecological artists like Richard Long, who has made a career of walking and creating "in" nature. Mr. Stephen's preferred means of transport is a bicycle. Rather than the stones or photographic record that Long leaves as his marks in the world, Mr. Stephen blazes trails on his bike. He shows the rest of us new ways to move through the world and think about our relationships to land and water. He has organized "no-pedal" tours of the old stream beds (long culverted) from the top of the watershed down to the mouth. He has presided over complex and curious introductions of groups of people that, at first meeting, would not expect to have anything in common. Despite John's training in engineering and law, it is quite obvious to those of us that work with him, that he has the heart and soul of an artist.

The STUDIO is working to model an integrated art program of awareness, social responsibility and opportunity-based analysis. The team's approach to NMR integrates experiential qualitative analysis (community) with quantitative analysis (professional) and puts the artist at the crux of change. Reclamation of water quality and vegetation is a definitive element of the aesthetics of place at Nine Mile Run. The project team's intent is to approach this object/subject of creative inquiry as an integrated aesthetic issue. The team firmly believes that the answers to the aesthetic issues that plague our public realm are not to be found in the disparate jargon and practice of monolithic disciplines. In the spirit of Robert Irwin, we are willing "to go anywhere, to do anything with anybody, at anytime" if someone expresses an interest in these issues. We take a holistic approach to culture, integrating discourse and access to information with adult and child alike¹⁹. We are charged and enabled by the STUDIO policy of integrating disciplines and community in all of our work.

Discourse and public space.

This brings us back to the question, "How do you begin to examine the value of a conversation?" Our goal was to enable an equitable public dialogue about brownfields and public space. We brought in professionals to clarify and communicate issues specific to the development of public space. We saw our work as enabling a process and policy discussion about public space, a discourse that was missing in the current program. To do this we had to seek support from the specific municipal agencies managing the current program. Despite the political support of these agencies, we retained our objectivity as a separate entity with our funding supplied by the Heinz Endowments. The Director of Pittsburgh City Planning, Eloise Hirsh and her staff (Joan Blaustein, John Rahaim and Dan Sentz) deserve recognition for working closely with us to enable this alternative public discussion.

¹⁹The STUDIO, working with the Pittsburgh Children's Museum has begun an inquiry based program using the arts and sciences to consider brownfields. Begun at the Montessori School in the Homewood neighborhood of Pittsburgh. Reiko Goto developed the initial program with art teacher Valerie Lucas. The expanded goal of this program is to build a grade school support system that will enable teachers to focus on the legacy and opportunity of brownfields and acid mine drainage. Nine Mile Run is being used as the case study.

Public dialogue involves a process of challenge and response, a collective evolution of the ideas which form the meaning of justice and the public good. There were a number of times in our roundtable discussions when team members felt that the challenge offered by some of our participants threatened to re-focus the discussion upon the issues relevant to the monitoring of potential liabilities connected to the development. While the theoretical approach demands that the legitimacy of a discourse be open to question and Seyla Benhabib²⁰ argues that the subject of discourse must be open to challenge as well, the questions asked were often outside the discipline and interests of the professionals we brought to the table. While we don't deny the import of understanding the total context of a problem, we had to be realistic about the issues that we were able to deal with given the constraints of time, funding and organizational interest. We would argue today, as we have, from the beginning, that the discourse on residential developments effect on private life was being explicitly addressed in the public meetings held by the Urban Redevelopment Agency, Pittsburgh City Planning and the development team. Furthermore, these official sites of public discourse were being well utilized by the community. Some of our vocal critics went back into that development discussion creating an alternative public of their own. They focused their interests on the potential liabilities of traffic, housing values and perceived toxicity. While the latter is specific to brownfields and is referred to in the literature, the former issues are common to any urban/suburban development.

We applaud both the community and the city for their commitment to a collective resolution of these issues. The city has made a bold decision to invest in further study (hiring a firm of the public's choice) to respond to these challenges and inform the public discussion about these issues.

The Community Dialogue Roundtables.

In the following paragraphs we will attempt to examine the three specific sites of public discourse, which were created to enable conversation:

- 1) The roundtables that occurred at each Community Dialogue event.
- 2) The onsite public access trailer and its attendant materials and experiments.
- 3) The project publication site on the World Wide Web.

At each of our public events we engaged both sound and video technicians to create a record of the event. We specifically focused on the roundtables, intending to "give voice" to our citizen participants. This process proved to be very useful for team members. The ability to review the video tapes to consider interaction, communication, conflict, and discursive productivity was an important tool as we fine tuned the process of enabling public discourse. We also decided to transcribe each event making the copy available to the community as part of the background package for each subsequent event. (See the graph and text following the conclusion for an overview of statistics extrapolated from the transcripts.)

There were three major changes to our program development over the four events. After History, Policy and Context, it became very clear that we needed to find a way to minimize the presentations,



John Stephen organized and led a NMR watershed Bicycle Tour in Spring 1996. Starting at the highest point in the watershed, we were able to coast most of the way into the Nine Mile Run Valley.

²⁰Benhabib, S., (1992) *Models of Public Space: Hannah Arendt, the Liberal Tradition and Jurgen Habermas*. Published in Habermas and the Public Sphere, Edited by Calhoun. The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts. P. 81-85

Various manifestation of the Community Dialogue process.



History Policy and Context



Stream Remediation



Community and Ecology



Sustainable Open Space

clarify the content in our background documents and maximize the time spent in the dialogue-based roundtable discussions. The second major change occurred when the advisory board for Community and Ecology decided to revamp the presentation part of the program and simply focus on what they called an exhibit approach. Each advisory board member developed a graphic presentation of the issues specific to that event. These professional advisors then stood next to their exhibits at the workshop so that participants could approach them. This was an interesting experiment in creating citizen instigated dialogue on specific issues. The final major change occurred in response to the need for more planning interaction with the community participants. In the final event, three tables were staffed by artists and landscape architects. Each table had a current topographical map and a historic watershed map with a variety of markers and tools to illustrate ideas. Each table was asked to follow a particular outline. In hindsight it is clear from the table responses that our outline was too complicated for such a short event. As a result we received a variety of responses which will provide a baseline on which to build upon for our work in 1998.

Numerous activities occurred at and emanated from the trailer including various meetings, assessment activities on the stream, flora and fauna, experiments in art, experiments in slag-soil plant growth and experiments in public communication. The trailer was used as a staging area for public tours varying from adults to school groups. Experiments were begun during the summer and fall, resulting in a donated greenhouse structure for the winter months.

Despite these obvious values, the team has mixed feelings about the relative success of the trailer as a site of public discourse. Funded by the university, the trailer remains onsite free of charge due to the graces of the landowner, the Urban Redevelopment Agency (URA) of the City of Pittsburgh. We value the trailer as it allows us to accomplish experimental work that is not possible offsite. At the same time, the maintenance and staffing issues are labor intensive. Furthermore as the majority of our public dialogue at the site is demonstrative or presentation oriented. We have not achieved the goal of using it as an interface rather than a presentation site. Notably the trailer has never had an independent funding stream so its programming and use has been an additional challenge. Recently we have secured funding which will allow us to tune various aspects of its function and more aggressively explore its role as a site for public discourse/public interface.

The project and its various products have been published and updated on the World Wide Web (<http://noumenon.cfa.cmu.edu/nmr>). The web site has grown organically over time with each background document being added to the web soon after the event. Various assessment programs with independent funding sources provide data that we post regularly. We have also provided interactive tools for comment and mailing from this electronic site.

We have received inquiries from all over the country and a handful from Europe and Canada about Nine Mile Run as a result of the wide availability of materials published on the web. The Nine Mile Run site is listed on a variety of important ecological and art-based link lists. We have had the opportunity to use the site as a tool for lectures in Japan and Germany. As a site of public discourse we feel that there is

work to be done on the web site. Over the summer we began experiments with various interactive technologies that would provide viewers a more active hand in commenting and adding to our site. With the pressures of the Community Dialogue event schedule we decided to put this off until we could focus more carefully on it. The web, while an equitable publishing tool, is still not easily configured for meaningful dialogue-based use. We will be coming back to this issue in 1998 and writing grants to pursue this important functionality.

Conclusion:

"How do you examine the value of a conversation?" This is an important question for those of us in the arts and humanities that believe as Joseph Beuys, that "*We need a foundation of social art, upon which every individual experiences and recognizes himself as a creative being and as a participant in shaping and defining the world.*"²¹

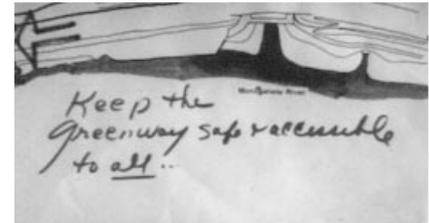
The social, cultural, environmental and economic reclamation of brownfields is a major shift in the way we make our world. Henri Lefebvre says, "Each society and its related means of production create a specific kind of physical space." What will the physical space of post-industrial Pittsburgh look like? Brownfields lie vacant on our rivers and bays, as do the slag heaps and refuse piles that have filled our valleys. The environmental devastation that accompanied the growth of industrial production can in some ways be laid at the feet of a homogenous society, a "public" that had one intent—production—and heard little challenge to that intention, its process or its effect.

The opportunity of the post-industrial era can be found in the diversity of interests represented at the Ample Opportunity workshops. From government and regulatory agency representatives to school teachers, housewives, electricians and lawyers, a wide range of interests sat at our tables and worked through conversations to build the future. As we consider the year's work, attempting to integrate critical thinking with democratic process, we find that this discursive process has reached consensus on a number of items. The notion of a water-centered greenway with a healthy, flowing stream paralleled with trails for hikers, bikers and variously-abled users has been clearly stated time and time again. A desire for functional links at Nine Mile Run between Frick Park and the Monongahela River future trail system has also been clearly communicated. Given the complexity of the problems at the site, the following issues will be addressed in future work:

- 1) What form will this greenway take?
- 2) How will grading affect the greenway?
- 3) What will it take to achieve a clean stream?
- 4) How can we appreciate the lessons of the NMR valley?

Ample Opportunity has provided a forum for the establishment of an alternative public: a discursive community that doesn't quite fit under the umbrella of citizens that examine and monitor urban development, nor under the umbrella of environmental interests that see our natural world in dualistic terms of wilderness or zoo. Our alternative public is neither strictly professional nor strictly community but an exciting mixture of both.

The property owners at Nine Mile Run are confined to the project site by the economic realities of their interests. The adjacent homeowners are likewise confined by their economic interests. If we



A scene from one of the Sustainable Open Space work tables and a comment

²¹Stachelhaus, H., (1987) *Joseph Beuys*, Abbeville Press, N.Y, N.Y.

are going to establish brownfields as viable public spaces with a potential for functional ecosystems and natural experience we must learn a new language, a new process, a new role as citizens and encourage new ways of doing business. We must learn to listen to new ideas, engage our children in the post-industrial dialogue and listen carefully to their thoughts and dreams for the future. We must work to learn the complexity of our local problems and find local solutions to those problems. We need to find a way to collaborate in our problem solving, with the clear realization that many of our environmental problems are not conveniently delineated by property lines, boundaries or municipal borders. We need to find new ways to bring a variety of public and private institutions to bear on our regional issues and learn new ways to resolve old problems.

In our next year's work, "Ample Opportunity: The Brownfield Intervention" we will move more deeply into the ideas and practice of art, ecosystem reclamation and discursive public space, within the context of post-industrial development. We will work with an expanded team of ecological scientists, a botanist and wetlands scientist, riverbed engineer, landscape architect and urban historian to assess various ecosystem functions and dysfunction. We will build on the community-based conceptual planning process, producing illustrated alternatives and a presentation of the work in 1999.



A milkweed seed pod, the dome greenhouse and the slag in the background. Images and symbols of a changing post-industrial landscape.