

*Design Competitions as “Political Weapons”:  
Considering the Role of Van Alen Institute in Architectural Production*

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## **Introduction**

What we might call architectural production is comprised of a thick web of individuals and organizations, ideas and built projects. This case study of Van Alen Institute represents a very small portion of that web, yet is instructive as to the role a single institution can play within the field of architectural production. When approaching a network of complex historical and associational connections, there is no choice but to start in the middle. As the work of Deleuze and Guattari implicitly suggests, jumping into the midst of a situation offers unique opportunities for understanding and altering relationships and events.<sup>1</sup> This paper examines the problems and possibilities encountered during a case study of Van Alen Institute (VAI) conducted from August 2007 through August 2008, which focused on the competition for Gateway National Recreation Area.

VAI presents an interesting case for study for a number of reasons. First, as an institute originally founded in 1894 Van Alen has a long, traceable history of architectural production. The organization is known for its annual design competition as well as for numerous publications and exhibitions. Secondly, the discourse within and around Van Alen is concerned with social change and efforts to re-envision or re-imagine public space. Thirdly, as a cultural institution, Van Alen has a unique capacity to foster and sustain social change. This is a case in which architectural production is intertwined with efforts to re-imagine and foster changes in the spaces of the city through the design competition. Examined more closely, these strands suggest a number of implications for understanding and interpreting the process of architecture competitions, as well as the work of the organization more generally.

Felicity Scott is an architectural historian who has similarly examined important historical moments in 20<sup>th</sup> century architecture to unravel the webs of architectural production and understand the larger social and political implications inherent in these cases. Her study of the Universitas Symposium hosted by Emilio Ambasz and held at MoMA in 1972 looks at the individuals involved and the documents produced, and reads that event and the early efforts of Ambasz to engage postmodern capitalism as offering the potential to “mediate a transformation from within this inescapable milieu.”<sup>2</sup>

In fact a number of recent social theorists have articulated the need to change spatial practices to transform the urban milieu.<sup>3</sup> The contemporary atmosphere for architectural production is dominated by hegemonic norms that reproduce the spatial status quo. This capitalist, neo-liberal ideology emphasizes image over substance, individual over collective use and all too often results in a landscape of disposable, disintegrated object buildings and a lack of quality public space.

David Harvey and others suggest action by insurgents to imagine and create spatial alternatives.<sup>4</sup> For many of these theorists, this involves the reemergence of utopian visions, which could provide an antidote to contemporary ideology.<sup>5</sup> However, some regard the gap between architectural practice and the forces of hegemony as too wide to be overcome by singular insurgents. These critics suggest that cultural institutions may be in a position to mediate between the visions of architects and the dominant socio-economic forces.<sup>6</sup> If so, it is possible that such institutions would be uniquely poised to foster social change. With this paper I wish to probe the ways in which an

organization can unify and multiply the efforts of individual designers working in different ways for similar ends: changing architectural practice and the built environment.

## **Background and History of Van Alen Institute<sup>7</sup>**

What is now known as Van Alen Institute was initially founded in 1894 as the Society of Beaux-Arts Architects. This was a group of young architects, many of whom had been educated at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris, who wanted to import the Beaux-Arts model of architectural education and practice to the US. They initially envisioned a National Academy of Design, but given their limited resources and a hesitancy to compete with other schools of architecture, they embarked on a program of hosting a series of design competitions each year. These competitions were intended to allow the Society to function as an umbrella organization and thereby disseminate the Beaux-Arts model into architectural schools and practice.

Let us assume such an attitude toward all the schools of architecture in this country as will make ourselves a link to bind them all together... While each school will maintain its own individuality, yet these competitions in which they will take part, and which are to be carried out under our auspices, will give them a common aim and will spread among them the influence and methods of the French school.<sup>8</sup>

The series of competitions culminated in an award called the Paris Prize, which sent the winner to study for a year in Europe. The first Paris Prize was awarded in 1904 and it continued until 1996. Consolidated under the Beaux-Arts Institute of Design (BAID) in 1916, the competitions hosted until 1940 were for grand public buildings, sited in no particular place, and conceived principally as formal exercises intended to promote the application of Beaux-Arts classicism.<sup>9</sup> For example, the one-page brief for the 1908 competition called for a theater in a large city and describes the program simply, "Like all theaters, it comprises two grand divisions: 1. The part for the public. 2. The part for the artists and administration." The program then notes a variety of required rooms, the lot: "250' wide and 450' deep, surrounded by streets on all sides," and concludes with a list of required drawings.<sup>10</sup> (Figure 1) While the program requirements for these competitions indicated no specific stylistic criteria, by staging the competition in a series of projects it was easy to ensure adherence to the Beaux-Arts principles. These competitions were seen as training exercises, preparing young architects in the Beaux-Arts tradition.

There were no competitions held from 1941 to 1946 and in 1947 the competitions resumed with a reduced emphasis on the Beaux-Arts classicism. While the projects remained without a specific site, the competitions gained a new civic-minded practicality and an inclination against tradition. The 1947 competition was for "A Community Cultural Center," the 1951 program was "A Bus Terminal," and the 1954 program for "A Town Center for New Enterprise" was thus narrated:

A community built around a war factory has grown with the conversion of the original plant into a home appliance factory and the addition of a number of other home utility manufacturers attracted to the area. The area needed for expansion will be opened up when a new highway and bridge join this industrial community with an older town once famous for its lumbering industry and now well known for its tradition of fine furniture craftsmanship. The prospect of two towns growing so that they merge physically but attempting to maintain social and

economic competition is never pleasing; it may be especially bad, as in this case, since the newer community resents the tendency of the old town to be overproud of its history and tradition...It appears that the wise course would be to establish an entirely new center which can serve as a stimulating nucleus for a unified, progressive town...The proposed name of the new combined area will be "New Enterprise."<sup>11</sup>

In line with this shift in emphasis, the organization was renamed the National Institute for Architectural Education in 1956. According to a historical summary of the institute published in 1974, "In the late Forties and Fifties with architectural schools gaining in stature, new systems closely related to industry were adapted and became the predominant teaching methods. The Beaux-Arts Institute of Design...elected to strengthen its own position by adopting a name more descriptive of its interests, thus, the National Institute for Architectural Education."<sup>12</sup> The new mission of the organization is further detailed in the following quotations:

NIAE is a service organization that seeks a better architectural environment through better education. As a professional organization, the NIAE offers its services to the Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture. We are not interested in promoting "methods" or "styles," but rather in improving and stimulating the creative process in the student through design problems evaluated on the basis of creativity rather than on technical proficiency alone.<sup>13</sup>

It is interesting to note the change in tone and effort to distance the NIAE from the initial Beaux-Arts model. While the mission was modified, the organization did maintain the programmatic elements of the annual competition and the travel fellowship—though the emphasis became more concentrated on civic engagement and the role of industry during the 1950's, and shifted to a more experimental orientation in the 1960s and 70s. For example the 1964 competition was for "An Antarctic Community" and the 1970 competition called for "A Vertical Plug-in Residential City." (Figure 2)

In 1972 the Van Alen Award was established in addition the Paris Prize. Whereas the Paris Prize was only open to US citizens under age 30 who had a degree in architecture, the Van Alen Award was an international student competition. A number of special competitions were also sponsored each year from 1963-1981 by industrial corporations such as Pittsburgh Plate Glass Co., the National Association of Metal Manufacturers, and the National Building Granite Quarries Association. The addition of corporate sponsorship reflected the practical and applied nature of NAIE's revised mission. Moreover it supplied the demand for competitive innovation from the commercial sector, and prefigured the growing trend towards corporate involvement in institutions.

It is also interesting to see how the annual competitions of a small organization like Van Alen relate to the broader shifts in architectural production. The selection of the competition programs and the designs of the winning entries suggest that neither the BAID nor the NAIE represented the architectural avant-garde, but rather drew upon leading ideas of the day. However, the BAID and NAIE, true to their mission, were influential in disseminating these concepts into the mainstream, stimulating students to take up these ideas, and projecting architectural production forward.

## **Recent History and Case Study Research**

The third and current incarnation of the organization is the Van Alen Institute. "In late 1995, the trustees of this non-profit organization renewed its mission of promoting the design and

implementation of the public realm, and renamed the Institute to represent this mission and to honor the organization's most significant benefactor, William Van Alen."<sup>14</sup> In addition, the mission was rewritten to reflect a connection to New York City as the "Institute's primary site for investigating the future of architecture and urbanism,"<sup>15</sup> and there was a new effort to "engage an interdisciplinary and international array of practitioners, policy-makers, students, educators, and community leaders."<sup>16</sup>

A few things are worth noting about the changes since 1995. First, the mission and programming have been continuously re-worked and adapted to represent the revised aims of the Institute.<sup>17</sup> Under Ray Gastil, the Executive Director from 1995-2005, an exhibition and publication series was instituted in addition to the annual competition to strengthen the educational aspect of the organization. Secondly, there has been an effort to connect with the legacy of William Van Alen and the NYC roots of the organization. VAI began circulating the iconic image of William Van Alen dressed as the Chrysler Building at the Beaux-Arts Ball (Figure 3), and the competitions have become focused primarily on New York City sites. Most significantly, since 1995 there has been a shift in the understanding of the public realm. Under Gastil, public space was perceived as being under threat from the private sector and there has been an emphasis on informing and educating the public and engaging with policy-makers. There was also a clear change in the competition programs to address actual sites and the competitions were no longer just for students, but were open, ideas competitions.

Beginning in 1996 Van Alen produced a number of publications and sponsored a series of open competitions relating to public space. The initial VAI competition generated ideas about the use of Governor's Island in New York Harbor. The 1999 TKTS Ticket Booth competition, won by John Choi and Tai Ropiha, has been constructed in Times Square and in addition to ticket facilities, provides seating for 1000 people in a kind of grand stair "public theater." (Figure 4) The 2001 competition addressed the Queens Plaza transit hub, and the 2006 competition called "Urban Voids" focused on empty lots in the landscape of Philadelphia. The competition to design a pavilion for the former parachute jump at Coney Island in 2005 drew 864 entries and was won by a London team, Carmody Groarke Hardie (Figure 5).

In January of 2005, Ray Gastil left Van Alen to take a position with the NYC Department of City Planning. Adi Shamir, a dean at the California College of Arts, was installed as the Executive Director in the summer of 2006. Upon being named the new director, Shamir declared:

We will define a structure and set of protocols and become the leading authority of design competitions. There isn't anyone who owns this area, and it is what we do best. I want to begin awarding fellowships and take the Van Alen New York prize to a new level. I also hope to broaden the Van Alen's scope regionally and beyond, and work with other states, groups and schools.<sup>18</sup>

This pronouncement, tracing the contours of the Institute's new approach, was the major impetus for my case study. In social science research, the case study is an exploration of a bounded system in order to understand process and develop what Clifford Geertz called thick description.<sup>19</sup> Case study research is particularly suitable to understand the processes, programs and projects of an organization like Van Alen. This study of Van Alen was conceived as a series of nested cases, the most central of which was to be the 2008 design competition. The competition is itself a process nested within the structure of Van Alen Institute, and enveloping VAI is the larger web of architectural production. Of course these structures and processes are interpenetrating and the aim of the research is to discover in what ways these intersections happen and what sorts of outcomes result.

Case study research employs multiple methods, which allows for triangulation in order to verify interpretations and clarify meanings. The methods I used included: 1) participant observation, which involved observing and/or participating in various meetings, conversations, and everyday activities at the Institute over a period of three months, 2) archival research, which included reviewing notes, correspondence, and submissions from the recent competitions, as well as the Institute's historic documents and publications, and 3) interviewing Van Alen personnel, in a semi-structured, but open-ended format. Using multiple methods allows for facts and insights to be corroborated between various pieces of information. By triangulating among the data collected, it is possible to examine the work of Van Alen in developing and administering the competition, as well as understanding the role Van Alen and the competition play in the broader scheme of architectural production.

My initial intent was to study the competition planned for 2008 and arrangements were made with Van Alen to observe and conduct interviews on a weekly basis; however, jumping into the middle of the things at VAI proved to be not so straightforward, and the focus of my project changed from the current competition to look at the previous year's competition for Gateway National Recreation Area. I will come back to talk more about the problems associated with this shift in focus, but first a review of the 2007 Gateway design ideas competition.

## **2007 Gateway Competition**

Gateway National Recreation Area covers 26,607 acres of the New York-New Jersey harbor and coast (Figure 6) and was designated a National Park in 1972. Gateway provides an array of wildlife habitats as well as recreational opportunities for the 20 million residents of the metropolitan area. It supports both natural and urban ecologies and is also the site of various public beaches, historic structures, and infrastructural systems. "The great number of visitors and diverse wildlife at the park attest to its undeniable potential, but because it lies in two different states and serves three different city boroughs it faces competing physical, cultural, and economic demands."<sup>20</sup> While Gateway is under the aegis of the National Parks Service, the National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA) has been the primary advocate for rethinking the way the area should be designed and used.<sup>21</sup>

The process leading to the Gateway competition was officially started on August 15, 2006 with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between NPCA, Van Alen Institute, and the Columbia University, Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation (GSAPP). The memorandum formalized previous talks and brought VAI in as a partner to run the competition process. In 2005 Alex Brash of NPCA had contacted Mark Wigley, the Dean of Columbia's GSAPP, who referred him to Kate Orff of the Spatial Information Design Lab at Columbia to produce a research report on Gateway. Subsequently, Sherida Paulsen, the Chair of the Board of Trustees at Van Alen, through conversations with Brash, suggested that Van Alen could host a competition for Gateway based on the research in the report from Columbia. In the fall of 2006, the Tiffany Foundation agreed to underwrite the competition and related proceedings.<sup>22</sup>

The MOU signed in August 2006 called for VAI to "organize, administer and coordinate all aspects" of the competition.<sup>23</sup> The competition, slated to open in the spring of 2007, would have two primary goals:

1. To initiate a dialogue in appropriate regional and national circles about a vision for, and a future for, Gateway National Recreation Area, and

2. To fairly, objectively, in a bi-partisan manner, and transparently sketch out an array of conceptual design concepts for the park's future, such that the winning designs, or appropriate components thereof, might actually be inserted in Gateway's next General Management Plan as Alternative Future Plans.

The work at Van Alen began with the development of a competition website during the fall of 2006. The website was intended to host the documents and information produced by the Spatial Information Design Lab as well as a competition brief that was being prepared by Van Alen in conjunction with the research study. The competition brief identified a number of particular concerns within seven general "Conditions and Challenges" that it asked entrants to address. These conditions and challenges included ecological, historical, recreational, educational, waste management, access and transportation, and economic strategies.<sup>24</sup> The brief also outlined a number of issues that would be used as criteria for jury evaluation. For example, the criteria asked that entrants recognize the diverse social and ecological activities, but at the same time establish a clear identity for the park and create a "destination place." Entrants were also asked to re-think the idea of "nature" in the post-industrial landscape, and consider the long-term viability of the park.<sup>25</sup> The brief required entrants to develop a master plan for the entire Gateway area, and also design a new park specifically for Floyd Bennett Field. Floyd Bennett Field is a 1,358 acre parcel that accommodated New York City's first municipal airport and was chosen as "representing a microcosm of the larger issues facing Gateway."<sup>26</sup> (Figure 7)

While developing the brief, VAI staff also assembled the competition jury. They began by coming up with a list of approximately thirty well-known figures, first in ten, then in twelve different categories, including architecture, planning, policy, ecology and landscape design. The names were then sorted into first choice and alternates in each category and the candidates were contacted for availability. Based on availability and the balance that Van Alen wished to create, the final 12-member jury was comprised of six people from the design fields and six from other, "non-design" areas.<sup>27</sup>

On October 14, 2006 a jointly-sponsored symposium called "Nature Now: The Urban Park as Cultural Catalyst" was held at Columbia's GSAPP, which brought together scientists, geographers, designers, historians, and park managers, "to discuss the current state of New York's urban landscape and the potentials and challenges of Gateway National Recreation Area."<sup>28</sup> In her concluding remarks, Adi Shamir introduced the competition and announced that it would open to entrants on January 29, 2007. Following Shamir's announcement, VAI staff worked to finalize the documentation, protocol, and website in time for the opening of the competition.

Registration for the competition opened to the public via the website on January 29, 2007. VAI held a press conference and an announcement was sent out through the VAI listserv. By March 14, the final day of registration, 226 individuals and teams from 23 different countries<sup>29</sup> had registered for the competition, and paid the entry fee.<sup>30</sup> Registrants were given a number and password access to high-resolution images, drawings and site information.<sup>31</sup> Following registration, there was a question and answer period during which questions were emailed to Van Alen and answers were posted on the website by March 30, in advance of the submission deadline.

95 submissions were received by the 5pm deadline on Monday May 7, 2007. Submissions were uploaded to the competition website in the form of two digital files to be printed on 30" x 40" boards, labeled A and B with only the registration number visible, for jury review.<sup>32</sup> These boards were required to include a master plan for Gateway, a plan of the proposed redesign of Floyd Bennett Field, and two perspective drawings.

On the evening of Monday May 7, the staff at VAI was set to prepare the submissions for the judging that was scheduled to take place in an old aircraft hangar at Floyd Bennett Field on the

following Saturday, May 12th. The staff began by downloading the submission files from a remote server to VAI computers where they checked the eligibility of the submissions<sup>33</sup> and formatted the files to be printed in books for the jury members. By the next morning all the files were delivered to the printer to print the boards as well as the books, which were shipped to the jurors on Wednesday. On Friday VAI staff cleaned the hangar at Floyd Bennett Field, set up equipment, and arranged the boards, which had been delivered from the printer.

On the morning of Saturday May 12, Shamir and VAI staff met the members of the jury at South Street Seaport for a tour of the Jamaica Bay portion of Gateway via water taxi. On the boat, introductions were made over breakfast and Alexander Brash of NPCA gave a brief welcome. By late morning, they arrived at Riis Landing, part of the competition site, and took a bus tour of Floyd Bennett Field. At noon, the jurors were dropped off at the aircraft hangar, had lunch, and were given an overview of the competition requirements and logistics by the competition co-chairs, Adi Shamir and Mark Wigley, dean of Columbia's GSAPP.

The jury members were divided into six pairs<sup>34</sup> and given instructions for the first round of judging. Each pair was asked to select 7 entries to remain out of the initial 95 submissions. The jurors went rapidly through the rows of entries, discussing the boards in pairs and after just under an hour,<sup>35</sup> they had selected a total of 28 entries<sup>36</sup> that remained and continued to the second round of jury deliberation.

After a short break, the jury gathered in chairs around a ring of tables for a discussion of the boards that had been selected. The co-chairs asked them to consider what innovative ideas were imagined and introduced by the entries, and how these new visions related to the criteria outlined in the competition brief and from their tour of the site. This discussion lasted just over an hour and culminated in each of the jurors, individually this time, selecting two entries to remain, which left 12 projects.<sup>37</sup>

At this point in the afternoon there was another break during which Mark Wigley and two jurors, Marian Heiskell and Wendy Paulson, departed due to other commitments. Following the break, the jury reconvened, this time with the remaining 12 boards arrayed around the table for further discussion and selection of the finalists. (Figure 8) The jurors began the final round of deliberation by speaking about each of the remaining projects one by one, suggesting what they liked or disliked about the boards. After these statements, the jurors were instructed to place one sticker on the project they would select to win. From this, project #241 received five votes, #227 received four votes, and three projects (#177, #179 and #226) each received one vote. However, the jurors were not clear or content with this arrangement of the finalists,<sup>38</sup> there was not a clear third place entry, and at least one juror, Walter Hood, felt a major idea had been left out:

I want to suggest that we don't give a first prize. That we don't create a hierarchy for these because myself, I don't feel that out of the whole bunch...not one single idea rises to the top... and saying that I'd like to include one more to discuss... and maybe a way to talk about the competition less as a fixed idea but various ideas to put Gateway in the minds of the public.<sup>39</sup>

Hood brought an entry, #203, which had not previously been selected in any of the rounds, into the discussion of the finalists. This introduction meant that there were six designs still under consideration, the five leading vote getters plus entry #203. There was some conversation about the possibility of not selecting a winner since no one candidate was commanding a clear lead, but Shamir felt that they had a responsibility to the contestants to select first, second and third place finalists. After further debate, Shamir suggested that they vote to eliminate from the six projects that were now under discussion.<sup>40</sup> In this voting by raising hands, #241 received 10 votes to stay and 0

to be removed; #227 received 9 votes to stay, 0 to be removed, and 1 abstention; #203 received 6 votes to stay, 3 to be removed, and 1 abstention; and the other three entries each received 5 or fewer votes to remain. The jurors then agreed that the bottom three would receive honorable mentions<sup>41</sup> and the next step would be to decide the order of the top three. One by one these projects were voted on for first prize by raising hands and in the final tally #227 received six votes, #241 received five, and #203 received zero.<sup>42</sup> The jurors agreed that #227 "Mapping the Ecotone" would be the winner, #241 "Reassembling Ecologies" would receive second prize, and #203 (Untitled) would be third.<sup>43</sup> After a few final instructions and thank yous, the deliberation was wrapped up and the jurors headed back to Manhattan.

The winners were contacted the following week, and the results were announced publicly via press release on June 4, 2007. First prize and \$15,000 went to Ashley Kelly and Rikako Wakabayashi of Brooklyn, NY for "Mapping the Ecotone," (Figure 9) second prize and \$10,000 went to North Design Office from Toronto for "Reassembling Ecologies," and third prize and \$5,000 went to a team from Virginia Polytechnic for their untitled entry. Honorable mentions and \$500 each went to the other finalists.<sup>44</sup>

All of the entries can be viewed online through the Envisioning Gateway website hosted by Van Alen,<sup>45</sup> and the six finalist projects were posted on the NPCA website<sup>46</sup> for eight months of public voting. In addition, Van Alen hosted an exhibition in their gallery of all of the competition boards during the fall of 2007. VAI and NPCA followed up the competition with a series of meetings with city and federal agencies<sup>47</sup> with the goal of presenting the results to the National Parks Service in order to incorporate the ideas generated by the competition into the NPS revision of the General Management Plan for Gateway scheduled for 2009.<sup>48</sup>

## Competition Problems and Possibilities

A number of authors have written about design competitions<sup>49</sup> and their basic conclusions can be summarized briefly. Based on interviews with architects, Jack Nasar,<sup>50</sup> concluded that competitions 1) discover new talent, 2) produce new or exciting solutions, and 3) generate publicity, but they also 4) may not produce the best solution, 5) reduce dialog with the client, 6) exploit architects, and 7) result in unbuilt projects.

In his essay included in the conference and publication "The Politics of Design Competitions," Deyan Sudjic offers evidence and anecdotes about the pitfalls and potential of competitions and concludes, "A successful competition system is one that forms a natural part of a national or civic culture. It allows for the competition to become a norm, used in a variety of different ways, in order to cut down on wasted effort, to identify new talent, and nurture it... It is not a panacea by itself, but it is, when used in the right way, a powerful tool to build better cities."<sup>51</sup>

Both of these authors basically agree with the common critical opinion that competitions in the U.S. at times produce remarkable results, but that those results are often elusive and coupled with difficulties such as budget constraints or untenable client-designer relations. So-called ideas competitions, like Gateway and many of the competitions hosted by Van Alen, may be an exception to the critique that competitions often result in less than favorable outcomes because they avoid the expectation of being built. Instead, ideas competitions are intended to open dialogue, stimulate the imagination, and generate publicity. In any case, design competitions have a number of implications for architectural practice and production.

Competitions are significant in the dissemination of leading edge ideas in the field of architecture. This is a two-way process; as advanced academics and practitioners frame competition programs and evaluate entries, their ideas influence a younger generation of designers. This process also works in the other direction as new ideas and techniques used in the competition entries become



known to more advanced practitioners. From an historical perspective, it is also interesting to see how the leading edge ideas from competitions display many of the primary concerns of each era, such as the community-building intentions of the 1954 competition for a Town Center, or the ecological concerns highlighted in the Gateway competition.

Another important role of competitions is in professional development. Competitions provide a forum or testing ground in which designers can improve their skills because of the quality and professionalism demanded by the process. While a few architects have had their careers launched through winning entries, it is more commonly the case that competitions have seeded the profession<sup>52</sup> as entrants respond to the various requirements of competition programs. Competitions provide an opportunity for professional development in areas that are not fully covered or exceed the usual grounds of academic or professional practice.<sup>53</sup> It is also important to note that competitions provide an apparatus for the maintenance of professional connections.<sup>54</sup> Through the interaction of competition jurors and the events surrounding the competition process, prominent practitioners are given opportunities to burnish their reputations and contribute to the architectural discourse, while younger members of the profession have the chance to become known.

These issues suggest one of the main criticisms of ideas competitions, which is that they function almost strictly as discursive events rather than producing any kind of action or change.<sup>55</sup> However, it is interesting to see how competitions produce ideas that haunt the discipline. The classic example is of the early modernist schemes that were among the losing entries in the Chicago Tribune Building competition. There are also occasions in which ideas generated in competition schemes find their way into later projects.<sup>56</sup>

Another criticism of competitions is that they serve to mask serious, often unaddressed issues.<sup>57</sup> Competitions may be held to avoid making difficult decisions about particular projects, or they may be used to draw attention away from heated political debates.<sup>58</sup> Competitions may also serve to hide deeper problems inherent in neoliberal capitalist processes, producing glossy images at the same time that they deny larger concerns or practical considerations.

While there are a number of possibilities and pitfalls to design competitions, perhaps their most important potential is spurring the public imagination. In identifying under-addressed sites or issues and asking designers to imagine possible futures, the public and the profession may be stimulated to recognize and take action to change an existing situation. In the case of Gateway, designers have become more aware of the site and its urban implications through the research report and competition website. The visions proposed, supported by the advocacy of NPCA, have encouraged the general public to engage in a dialogue about the resources available for use. Government agencies have also been prompted to consider and make plans for the renewal of the park, drawing upon a broader array of ideas than would have been possible without the competition.

Looking more closely at Gateway, it is possible to discern many of the issues that design competitions raise. While it remains to be seen whether the competition remains strictly about ideas (as is likely) or whether there is a chance that something desirable is realized in the park, there are a few other specific problems and possibilities that have emerged. The most striking issue was that due to breakdowns in the protocol for selecting the finalists, the entry that was ultimately declared the winner had not been the entry that was most well-liked throughout the deliberation process.<sup>59</sup>

Up until the very last moments, #241 "Reassembling Ecologies," which received second prize, had been the most favored entry, but as some of the designers on the jury realized that it was likely to win, they changed their vote because they thought the images presented on the boards were "too generic" for New York City. This last minute change, combined with the feelings of some jurors that they should forego selecting a top three, suggests that there was no clear winner—as one of the jurors expressed during the discussion and voting. "I agree with everything you say...in the

context of a competition...this is the dilemma of being a juror...I want to see something...and no one project does it...<sup>60</sup>

Another sticking point in the Gateway competition was the lack of engagement with the public throughout the competition development process. While VAI as an organization has an explicitly public mission and many of the individual people involved in the process have strong commitments to the larger public, there were few instances in which the public was directly engaged during the competition. The competition was open to anyone who wished to submit and the entries were displayed publicly, but at no time during the process were members of the general public, such as residents in the vicinity or Gateway visitors, asked for their input on the site, program, or criteria for winning entries. Public opinion was not solicited at any point in the development of the brief or in the judging process—only once the winners were already selected was the public engaged. In this way, the competition remained a characteristically elitist process in which the people involved with the competition came from within a relatively narrow professional community and the most privileged social groups.

The Gateway competition, like most ideas competitions, has little or no chance of being realized in the form depicted in the winning entries. During deliberation, a number of jurors noted this and suggested that interesting aspects and ideas from a variety of the submissions be culled for the future planning of Gateway.<sup>61</sup> Another issue that was raised by members of the jury familiar with the Parks Service was that some of the finalists would not fit with the current practices of the NPS.<sup>62</sup> While some jurors saw this as an opportunity to expand or re-define NPS practices, other jurors felt that these projects would simply remain on the drawing board. Perhaps this is the crux of ideas competitions, that while they remain impractical and are likely to be unrealized, they still offer the potential of changing, expanding, or re-defining the current state of affairs. Mark Wigley stated this possibility in an interesting way in his introduction to the jurors, “What you're looking at are not images of what the future of this field would be, but you're looking at kind of political weapons. In other words, if you throw that image into the situation what might result?”<sup>63</sup>

The long term impact of the Gateway competition remains to be seen, and it will take time to understand the ways in which this competition may have influenced architectural production, but this competition, and the work of Van Alen more generally, suggest a number of important possibilities. While it has yet to appear on the cover of the New York Times as Mark Wigley asked the jurors to imagine,<sup>64</sup> Gateway has generated some public dialogue<sup>65</sup> and remains an important issue for New York City and the National Parks Service. Through the work of the competition partners, Gateway has served as a stage for academic, professional, and public interests to identify and begin to work out the issues of this large and important site.

### **Looking More Closely at VAI**

As discussed above, the examination of the competition was nested within a larger study of Van Alen itself, as an institution with the potential to foster and sustain social change through architecture and urban design. In many ways the problems and potential of VAI parallel that of the competition. There are questions about how the organization defines itself and engages the public,<sup>66</sup> difficulties between being discursive or practical in the design and political arenas, and issues with insider-ness and influence. At the same time, possibilities for reconfiguring spatial practices also exist in the way the organization situates itself in relation to academia and practice, and in the strength of its resources and history.

One of the most obvious issues is that of institutional cohesion and continuity. While the general mission of the organization has remained relatively stable throughout its more than hundred year history, its image and the way it presents itself has changed rather drastically from a Beaux-Arts

society to a resource for architectural education, and most recently to an institute focused on the public realm. Looking more closely it becomes evident that these changes have been due to external shifts in design culture as well as internal changes in the Institute's leadership. The latest incarnation of the organization is no exception. Adi Shamir and her staff have introduced a new fellowship program, rethought the purpose and scope of upcoming competitions, and created a new website that will accommodate a digital archive of their materials. With the website and digital archive they are looking to represent the Institute's legacy, strengthen the ties of the organization to its own history, and find models for practice in the Institution's past.<sup>67</sup>

One example of a practice they are pursuing is that of partnerships with academic and private organizations. They have shifted into a mode of operating in which they are considering their activities in "business" terms, including the cultivation of relationships that can be beneficial to the Institute, and refusing to share resources without return.<sup>68</sup> Hand-in-hand with this new mindset comes a more concentrated pursuit of funding from numerous sources including both grant money from other non-profit organizations as well as funding from private individuals and corporations.<sup>69</sup>

This new attitude and approach reinforces one of the strongest features of any organization involved in the design or political realms—that of insider-ness and professional networks—and raises the question of "who knows whom?" In the case of Van Alen, many of the plans and programs are formulated based on the latest trends, who or what may be the current hot topic, and even gossip. The connections also rest heavily on academic or professional genealogies<sup>70</sup> that serve both in a practical way to forge ties and open doors, but also in a way that perpetuates the dominant status of the institutions and existing leaders in the profession. This issue presents one of the key concerns for institutions that have public participatory missions. There is a need for the strength and stability that comes from established networks and connections, but there is also the danger of a tendency towards exclusion and routinization. Although Van Alen has been around for over 100 years, it has been nimble in its ability to negotiate this dilemma because it has remained small and willing to re-work its mission and programming to suit the strengths of its staff and to address its historical moment. VAI has also remained true to its core mission to influence students and young designers, which has compelled them to find practices that aim beyond the upper echelon of the profession to address a more diverse constituency. At the same time, the new staff at Van Alen is still working to find a balance between the usefulness of professional networks and the exclusive clubbiness they often produce. This issue is highlighted to some extent because the director and staff are relatively new to New York City and, while they have introduced fresh connections, they have at times fallen back upon personal networks instead of using local or public resources.

In other ways the new staff has helped VAI develop new resources and become more robust and accessible to the public. Their new strategies for securing funding and developing partnerships should allow greater continuity, stability and substance in their programming. Their new website displays a commitment to making much more of their material available to the public and their programs are becoming more transparent simply by providing the public with more information. Having a stronger presence on the internet also allows VAI a broader and more international scope, both in the audience for the ideas and projects they are promoting as well as for the number of potential entrants in their future competitions.

Perhaps the strongest aspect of the new incarnation of VAI is in the way they are situating themselves between academia and practice and the way they define themselves as a "platform." According to the new staff, Van Alen is "a platform that occupies the space between academia and the profession, between museums and street culture...it extends the reach you can have and the things you can do..."<sup>71</sup> While fitting neither into the profession nor academia risks failing to engage either area, it is likely that VAI will be able to respond more deftly and directly to political agendas<sup>72</sup> as well as continue to disseminate leading edge ideas to both communities. Also, as a "platform,"

VAI provides the structure for insurgents to operate, giving them both the support necessary to develop projects and a stage to broadcast their ideas.

One of the reasons I chose to study Van Alen is my interest in the possibilities for producing spatial and social alternatives, and the impression that VAI is an institution consciously positioned to foster these alternatives through new spatial arrangements and practices. Van Alen regards their programs and competitions as a means for re-imagining the future and they have at times employed the concept of "utopia" to indicate this ambition. However, it is interesting to observe that "utopia" is used discursively to cushion their work and deflect possible criticism, rather than as an indication of radical intention. In both public and private forums, the notion of "utopia" is used to couch, preface, dismiss, or offset the challenging ideas and proposals that arise from their competitions and programs. In multiple instances, VAI staff suggested that the ideas and proposals generated in the competitions were "provocative" or "utopian," but that the intentions of the Institute were more "grounded." By disavowing intentions or actions that could be seen as explicitly radical, they keep these "utopian" ideas within the realm of conversation.

These observations raise an important question: To what extent can an institution operate within conventional relations of production and still foster radical or "utopian" solutions to problems produced by those relations? Contemporary architectural production can present serious constraints<sup>73</sup> within which an institute like Van Alen must operate. These constraints may limit what an institute can explicitly undertake; however, the frameworks established by an institution can allow it to mediate between established convention and "utopian" practice. By creating a venue, like the Gateway competition, in which diverse voices and visions can be expressed, Van Alen has been able to bring imaginative alternatives to a broad audience. By introducing new ideas and practices, like web-based competitions and archives, Van Alen has been able to shift the conventions of production, and modify both discourse and practice. By addressing and incorporating multiple stakeholders, like academia and the profession, Van Alen has been able to introduce and sustain long-term changes in architectural production. In each of these practices, Van Alen is able to maintain its stable, institutional presence and at the same time bend architectural production towards a more inclusive, participatory, and "utopian" future.

## **Concluding Thoughts**

In essence, then, the Gateway competition was both atypical and exemplary of what Van Alen competitions have been up to this point. It is an example of 'best practices' that contrasts with past competitions due to the thoroughness of research, the strength of its partnerships, the quality of its administration, and its accessibility to the public via new channels, especially the internet. At the same time, the Gateway competition set a high bar for future VAI competitions by demonstrating what can be accomplished when Van Alen is able to successfully operate among formidable resources.

As an institution, VAI has great potential to mediate between academic, governmental, and professional interests, and engage their resources to forge alternatives to conventional practices. Van Alen has demonstrated the capacity to concentrate, elaborate, and disseminate the ideas and actions of "insurgents" even as they negotiate and work with established institutions and leaders in the profession. At the same time, they have to guard against complacency and stagnation or the stockpiling of resources that reify and reinforce existing relations of power and privilege. Perhaps one way for Van Alen to stay on its toes is to heed the words of Walter Benjamin,<sup>74</sup> and recognize that their resources must always be engaged in modifying production, lest they merely reproduce the status quo.

Although there is no single resolution of the sorts of dilemmas that an institution like Van Alen faces, the principles of pragmatism and the metaphor of the rhizome suggest a constructive approach. Pragmatism<sup>75</sup> asserts that the best possible action in any situation can be established, but also remains conditional, such that practices are not codified and a terminal solution is never assumed. While the practices of institutions generally represent conventions that have been established over time, pragmatism leaves room to experiment—and if better practices are found, to adopt them—rather than preserve conventions in perpetuity. An institution with this attitude can remain flexible and dexterous in response to both internal and external changes, and will not become obsolete or be forced to react defensively to protect its own interests. With this pragmatic, change-oriented mindset, institutions are likely to be among the leaders in developing and advancing alternative futures.

The rhizome also offers a model for institutional practices. Described by Deleuze and Guattari, the rhizome is a non-hierarchical system in which people and projects, institutions and ideas come together in contingent and emergent relationships.<sup>76</sup> Embracing contingency and accepting a network of non-hierarchical relations allows an institution to shift rapidly and draw the most from the resources that come together in any given situation. In fact, Deleuze and Guattari use the term "plateau" to describe the intensification of connections that results from things coming together in concert. This seems remarkably similar to the model of a "platform" in which Van Alen is currently fashioning itself, and suggests a way of working in which Van Alen facilitates and enables these relationships to come together and flourish.

Realizing social and spatial alternatives will require working in flexible, dexterous, contingent, and non-hierarchical ways. Institutions that operate as rhizomatic platforms can best deploy resources and support a variety of agents and practices aimed at change. Achieving this change and continuing it in a way that remains open-ended is best accomplished by relying on the approach of pragmatism. Taken together, the principles of pragmatism and the model of the rhizome offer an intriguing paradigm for institutions working towards alternative social and spatial futures.

## Notes:

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<sup>1</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. "Introduction: Rhizome" in *A Thousand Plateaus* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

<sup>2</sup> Felecity D. Scott, "On the "Counter-Design" of Institutions: Emilio Ambasz's Universitas Symposium at MoMA," *Grey Room* 14 (2004): 46-77.

<sup>3</sup> See Iain Bourden et al., eds. *The Unknown City: Contesting Architecture and Social Space* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002). Other, specific authors that have critically addressed contemporary spatial practices include Henri Lefebvre, David Harvey, Edward Soja, Bernard Tschumi, and Cindi Katz.

<sup>4</sup> David Harvey, *Spaces of Hope* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

<sup>5</sup> See David Harvey; Paul Ricoeur, "Ideology and Utopia as Cultural Imagination" in *Being Human in a Technological Age* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1979); Lewis Mumford, *The Story of Utopias* (New York: Viking, 1992).

<sup>6</sup> See W. Richard Scott, *Institutions and Organizations* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2001); Irit Rogoff, "Academy as Potentiality," in Angelika Nollert et al, *A.C.A.D.E.M.Y.*, (Revolver, 2006) pp.13-20; David Carr, *The Promise of Cultural Institutions* (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2003).

<sup>7</sup> What is now the Van Alen Institute has gone through four formal incarnations:

*Society of Beaux-Arts Architects* (1894-1916)

*Beaux-Arts Institute of Design* (1916-1956)

*National Institute for Architectural Education* (1956-1996)

*Van Alen Institute* (1996 - Current)

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- <sup>8</sup> Ernest Flagg, "An Address" (speech given at the inaugural meeting by the president of the Society of Beaux-Arts Architects, New York, 1894).
- <sup>9</sup> Typical examples include the inaugural competition program for "A Colonial Institute," the 1905 program for "A Yacht Harbor and Club," and the 1908 program, won by William Van Alen for "A Theater."
- <sup>10</sup> L. Gaudet, "A Theater" (Program for the Final Competition for the Fifth Paris Prize, Society of Beaux-Arts Architects, New York, 1908).
- <sup>11</sup> Richard M. Bennett, "A Town Center for New Enterprise" (Program for the 41<sup>st</sup> Paris Prize in Architecture, Beaux-Arts Institute of Design, New York, 1954).
- <sup>12</sup> "Historical Summary" in the National Institute for Architectural Education Circular of Information (New York, 1974).
- <sup>13</sup> Gillet Lefferts, Forward to the National Institute for Architectural Education Yearbook (New York, 1965) 3.
- <sup>14</sup> Ray Gastil, "Sponsor" (Program for the 1996 Paris Prize Competition Program, Van Alen Institute, New York, 1996).
- <sup>15</sup> Ray Gastil, ed. "History" in *Van Alen Report 1*, New York, 1996.
- <sup>16</sup> Zoe Ryan, ed. Mission Statement from *Van Alen Report 12*, New York, 2002.
- <sup>17</sup> The mission statement was tailored to specific audiences and modified in each of the Reports issued by Van Alen under Ray Gastil, and continues to be revised under the current director.
- <sup>18</sup> Matt Chaban, "Van Alen Names New Director," *Architect's Newspaper*, February 1, 2006.
- <sup>19</sup> Clifford Geertz, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture". In *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*. (New York: Basic Books, 1973) 3-30.
- <sup>20</sup> Van Alen Institute, "Introduction" Envisioning Gateway, [http://www.vanalen.org/gateway/logistics\\_intro.php](http://www.vanalen.org/gateway/logistics_intro.php)
- <sup>21</sup> NPCA, founded in 1919 and located in Washington D.C., is an independent, membership organization dedicated to protecting the National Park System.
- <sup>22</sup> According to unpublished budgets from Van Alen Institute, VAI billed NPCA \$55,500 for the competition process, which presumably was paid by the Tiffany Foundation.
- <sup>23</sup> Gateway was initially conceived of as a two-phase competition, in which the winners of the first, open ideas phase would refine their proposals in a second phase. However, since there was no agreement with NPS as to what would happen with the winning entry, it was decided that the competition would be limited to a single phase. (Interview with Van Alen Institute staff member.)
- <sup>24</sup> Van Alen Institute, "Conditions and Challenges" Envisioning Gateway, [http://www.vanalen.org/gateway/logistics\\_prog\\_req.php](http://www.vanalen.org/gateway/logistics_prog_req.php)
- <sup>25</sup> Van Alen Institute, "Criteria" Envisioning Gateway, [http://www.vanalen.org/gateway/logistics\\_prog\\_req.php](http://www.vanalen.org/gateway/logistics_prog_req.php)
- <sup>26</sup> Van Alen Institute, "Requirements" Envisioning Gateway, [http://www.vanalen.org/gateway/logistics\\_prog\\_req.php](http://www.vanalen.org/gateway/logistics_prog_req.php)
- <sup>27</sup> See note 34 for the complete list of jury members present on the day of deliberation. Of the initial twelve top choices, four agreed to serve as jurors.
- <sup>28</sup> GSAPP, "Nature Now: The Urban Park as Cultural Catalyst" <http://www.arch.columbia.edu/index.php?pageData=64829///>
- <sup>29</sup> Unpublished document from Van Alen Institute.
- <sup>30</sup> The registration fee was \$125 until March 14, 2007, and a late registration fee of \$150 was charged until March 30th. This fee was higher than the fee for previous competitions (approximately \$50) in order to cover the costs of printing the boards from the digital files that were submitted. According to unpublished budgets, VAI collected \$29,775 in entry fees.
- <sup>31</sup> Low resolution images, site maps and the GSAPP Research Report were (and continue to be) available for public download. [http://www.vanalen.org/gateway/site\\_overview.php](http://www.vanalen.org/gateway/site_overview.php)
- <sup>32</sup> Entrants also submitted smaller versions of their boards for online viewing, as well as a thumbnail image and project description of 250 words or less.
- <sup>33</sup> Eligibility was determined according to the requirements for anonymity, layout of the boards, required drawings, required text, and size of the files. According to VAI records, all 95 entrants met the eligibility requirements.
- <sup>34</sup> The jury pairs had been previously decided by VAI to match "designers" and "non-designers" as follows:
- Pair 1:  
Marian Heiskell, Newspaper Executive, Conservationist, Philanthropist  
Walter Hood, Principal, Hood Design
- Pair 2:  
Andrew Darrell, Director, New York Region, Environmental Defense  
John Loring, Design Director, Tiffany & Co.
- Pair 3:  
Peter Latz, Principal, Latz + Partner Landscape Architects  
Wendy Paulson, Trustee, The Nature Conservancy of New York and Board Chair, Rare Conservation

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Pair 4:

Randall Luthi, Deputy Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
Anuradha Mathur, Principal, Mathur/da Cunha and Associate Professor of Landscape Architecture, University of Pennsylvania

Pair 5:

Steward Pickett, Plant Ecologist, Institute for Ecosystem Studies  
Lindy Roy, Principal, Roy, Co.

Pair 6:

Ethan Carr, National Park Service Historian, Assistant Professor of Landscape Architecture, University of Massachusetts, Amherst

Nanette Smith, Chief of Staff on behalf of Patricia Harris, First Deputy Mayor of New York City

<sup>35</sup> At least two jury members remarked on the difficulty of reviewing all the entries and coming to a consensus with their partner in the allotted time.

<sup>36</sup> A number of jury pairs selected the same projects to remain, thus the overlap reduced the number of entries in the second round to 28 from the 42 anticipated. The 28 selected to remain were: 101, 110, 113, 120, 127, 139, 148, 152, 159, 177, 179, 185, 201, 218, 226, 227, 230, 241, 244, 248, 262, 271, 291, 293, 311, 319, 320, 322. Entry 203, which was the 3rd prize winner, was not originally selected to remain, but was added later.

<sup>37</sup> Again there was significant overlap with a number of entries receiving votes from multiple jurors, reducing the number of entries selected for the third round to 12 from the anticipated 24. The 12 entries remaining after the second round of judging were: 110, 152, 159, 177 (2 votes), 179 (3 votes), 185, 201, 226 (3 votes), 227 (5 votes), 241 (4 votes), 291, 322.

<sup>38</sup> According to audio-taped jury deliberation proceedings, at least two of the jurors changed their stickers after they saw how others had voted.

<sup>39</sup> Transcription of audio-taped jury deliberation proceedings.

<sup>40</sup> Projects under discussion at this point were: 241, 227, 203, 177, 179, 226.

<sup>41</sup> Shamir argued for only two honorable mentions, but the jury would not eliminate any of the three lowest.

<sup>42</sup> Before she left, Marian Heiskell had told Shamir that she would vote for #241 as the winner.

<sup>43</sup> While this reconstruction of the jury deliberation and voting makes the process appear to be fairly democratic, the audio-recordings reveal it to be far more haphazard, which I address later in this paper. If anything, consensus was achieved in the style of what one juror referred to as a "Quaker meeting."

<sup>44</sup> Archipelago Architecture and Landscape Architecture from New York, NY submitted entry #177 "[Un]natural Selection." loop8 - Christopher Marcinkoski and Andrew Moddrell from Larchmont, NY submitted entry #179 "Urban Barometer." Frank Gesualdi and Hayley Eber from New York, NY submitted #226 "H2grOw."

<sup>45</sup> Van Alen Institute, "Online Exhibition" Envisioning Gateway, [http://www.vanalen.org/gateway/exhibition\\_entrants.php](http://www.vanalen.org/gateway/exhibition_entrants.php)

<sup>46</sup> NPCA, "Finalists," Envisioning Gateway, <http://www.npca.org/gateway/finalists.html>, and NPCA, "The Public Votes," Envisioning Gateway, <http://www.npca.org/gateway/votes.html>

<sup>47</sup> Following the announcement of the competition winners VAI and NPCA staff met with the National Parks Service. On September 24, 2007 staff from Van Alen, NPCA, and Columbia met with the NYC Parks Department, as well as with people from DEP, DOT, and PLANYC 2030. (Interview with Van Alen Institute staff member.)

<sup>48</sup> In July and September 2009 the National Parks service is holding public open houses at various locations within Gateway, in addition to taking online comments, as part of the process of writing a new General Management Plan for Gateway. <http://www.nps.gov/gate/parkmgmt/gmp.htm>

<sup>49</sup> See Helene Lipstadt, ed. *The Experimental Tradition: Essays on Competitions in Architecture*

(New York: The Architectural League, 1989), Catherine Malmberg, ed. *The Politics of Design: Competitions for Public Projects* (Princeton: Policy Research Institute, 2006), and Jack Nasar, *Design by Competition: Making Design Competition Work*. (London: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

<sup>50</sup> Jack Nasar, *Design by Competition: Making Design Competition Work*. (London: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

<sup>51</sup> Deyan Sudjic, "Competitions: The Pitfalls and the Potential," in *The Politics of Design: Competitions for Public Projects*, ed. Catherine Malmberg (Princeton: Policy Research Institute, 2006).

<sup>52</sup> I use the term seeded because of the dissemination of ideas, the growth of individuals through competitive activity, and because entrants come from a range of locations and positions within the profession.

<sup>53</sup> Competitions demand more creative response than is typical in professional practice, but they also demand a more professional response than is typical in academic design studios.

<sup>54</sup> And in so doing, aid in the production of social capital—an important but often unaddressed aspect of architectural practice.

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- <sup>55</sup> Magali Sarfatti Larson, "Architectural Competitions as Discursive Events." *Theory and Society* 23:4 (1994).
- <sup>56</sup> This is evident in the work of many architects, but see especially Zaha Hadid, Rem Koolhaas, Enrique Miralles.
- <sup>57</sup> See Anthony Ward, "The Suppression of the Social in Design: Architecture as War," in *Reconstructing Architecture*, ed. Thomas A. Dutton and Lian Hurst Mann (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).
- <sup>58</sup> For example, the competitions held for the design of the new World Trade Center following 9/11.
- <sup>59</sup> There were a handful of irregularities—the reintroduction of entry #203 after it had been eliminated by the jury; a few of the jury members and Mark Wigley, the co-chair, left before the winners were chosen—however, these incidents did not likely impact the final outcome in a significant way.
- <sup>60</sup> Transcription of audio-taped jury deliberation proceedings.
- <sup>61</sup> While there is no formal procedure in place for culling the most interesting ideas from the competition entries for future use, all of the entries remain viewable on the Gateway website (see note 43) and VAI is planning to produce a publication of the competition results.
- <sup>62</sup> The competition brief did not ask entrants to address current NPS practices or policy and because the competition was not held under NPS auspices, some jurors felt that challenges to these practices (especially those involving budget and facility design) would not be productive.
- <sup>63</sup> Transcription of audio-taped jury deliberation proceedings.
- <sup>64</sup> From the audio-taped jury deliberation proceedings.
- <sup>65</sup> NPCA, "Competition Comments," <http://www.npca.org/gateway/comments.html>
- <sup>66</sup> "Public" is a concept used by Van Alen in various ways. Their mission refers explicitly to the "public realm" which they take to mean both the physical public spaces of the city as well as the political discourse. Sometimes "public" is used to indicate the general public (i.e. inhabitants of public spaces and readers of newspapers), while at other times it refers more specifically to members of the design profession. In some cases "public" is used to refer to individuals in positions of power in the public and private sectors whom Van Alen wishes to inform or connect with.
- <sup>67</sup> Interview with Van Alen Institute staff member.
- <sup>68</sup> Interviews with Van Alen Institute staff members.
- <sup>69</sup> Note that these are neoliberal trends that have become common across the non-profit sector.
- <sup>70</sup> See Roxane Kuter Williamson, *American Architects and the Mechanics of Fame* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991) or Alexander Caragone, *The Texas Rangers: Notes from the Architectural Underground* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995).
- <sup>71</sup> Interview with Van Alen Institute staff member.
- <sup>72</sup> Such as PLANYC 2030, which VAI has indicated they intend to address in future competitions.
- <sup>73</sup> The most ubiquitous constraints being financial (the need for projects to be funded and/or having limited budgets), convention (the requirement that projects hold to both aesthetic and social norms), professional (the belief that design is an expertise belonging a limited group), representation (the emphasis on visual images to represent a project), and time (the demand that projects be realized within a limited schedule).
- <sup>74</sup> Walter Benjamin, "Author as Producer" (1934) in *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings* (New York: Schocken, 1986) 220-238.
- <sup>75</sup> See William James, "What Pragmatism Means," (1907) in H.S. Thayer, ed. *Pragmatism: The Classic Writings* (New York: Mentor Books, 1970) 209-227; John Dewey, "The Construction of Good," (1929) in H.S. Thayer, ed. *Pragmatism: The Classic Writings* (New York: Mentor Books, 1970) 290-315; Richard Rorty, "Introduction: Pragmatism and Philosophy," in *Consequences of Pragmatism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982) xiii-xlvii.
- <sup>76</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. "Introduction: Rhizome" in *A Thousand Plateaus* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).



*Considering the Role of Van Alen Institute in Architectural Production*  
Figures

Figure 1. 1908 winning entry for "A Theater" by William Van Alen

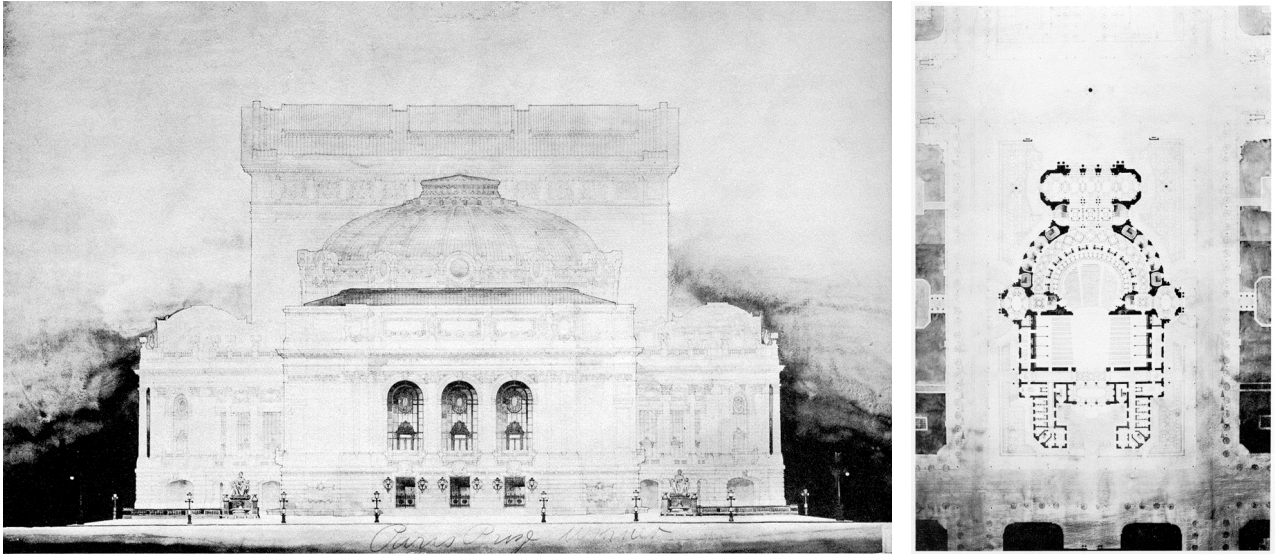


Figure 2. 1970 winning entry for "A Vertical Plug-in Residential City" by Claud Emrich

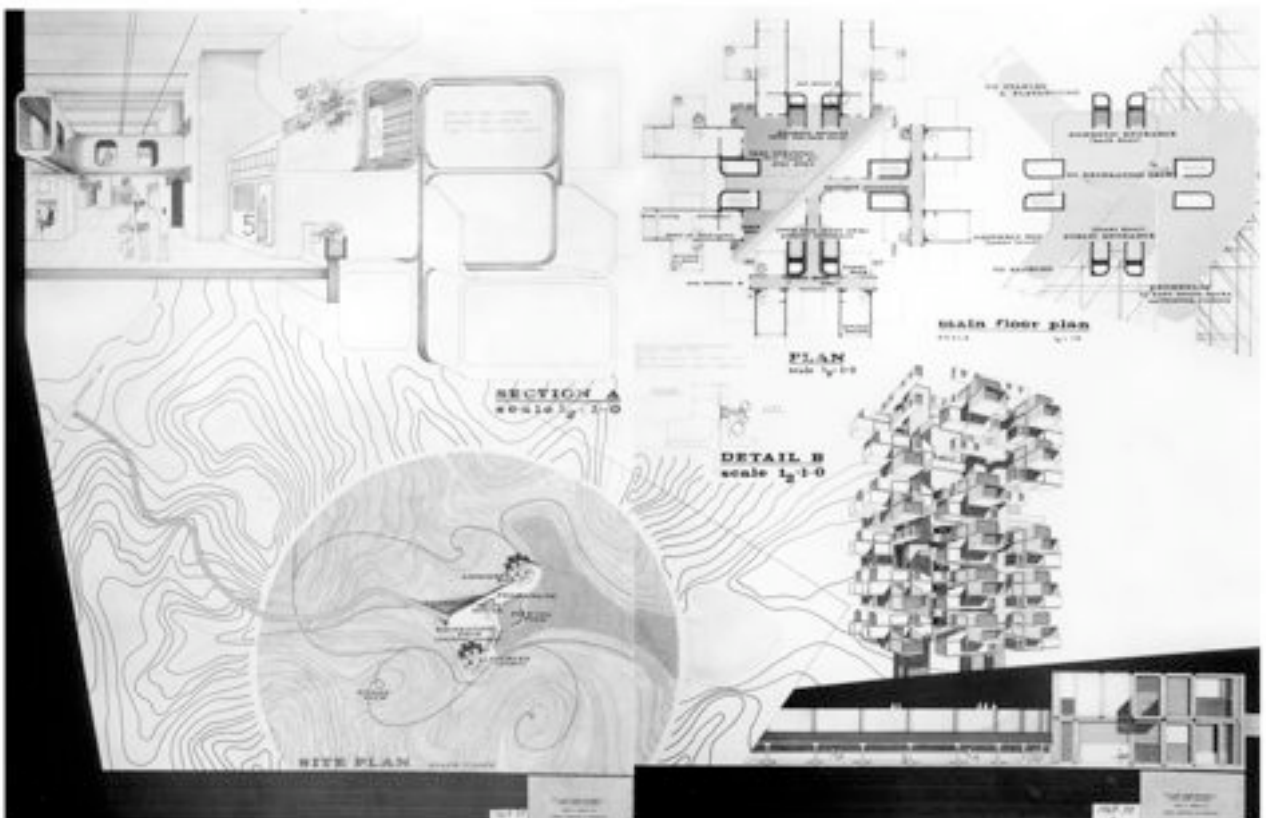


Figure 3. William Van Alen in Chrysler Building costume at the Beaux-Arts Ball

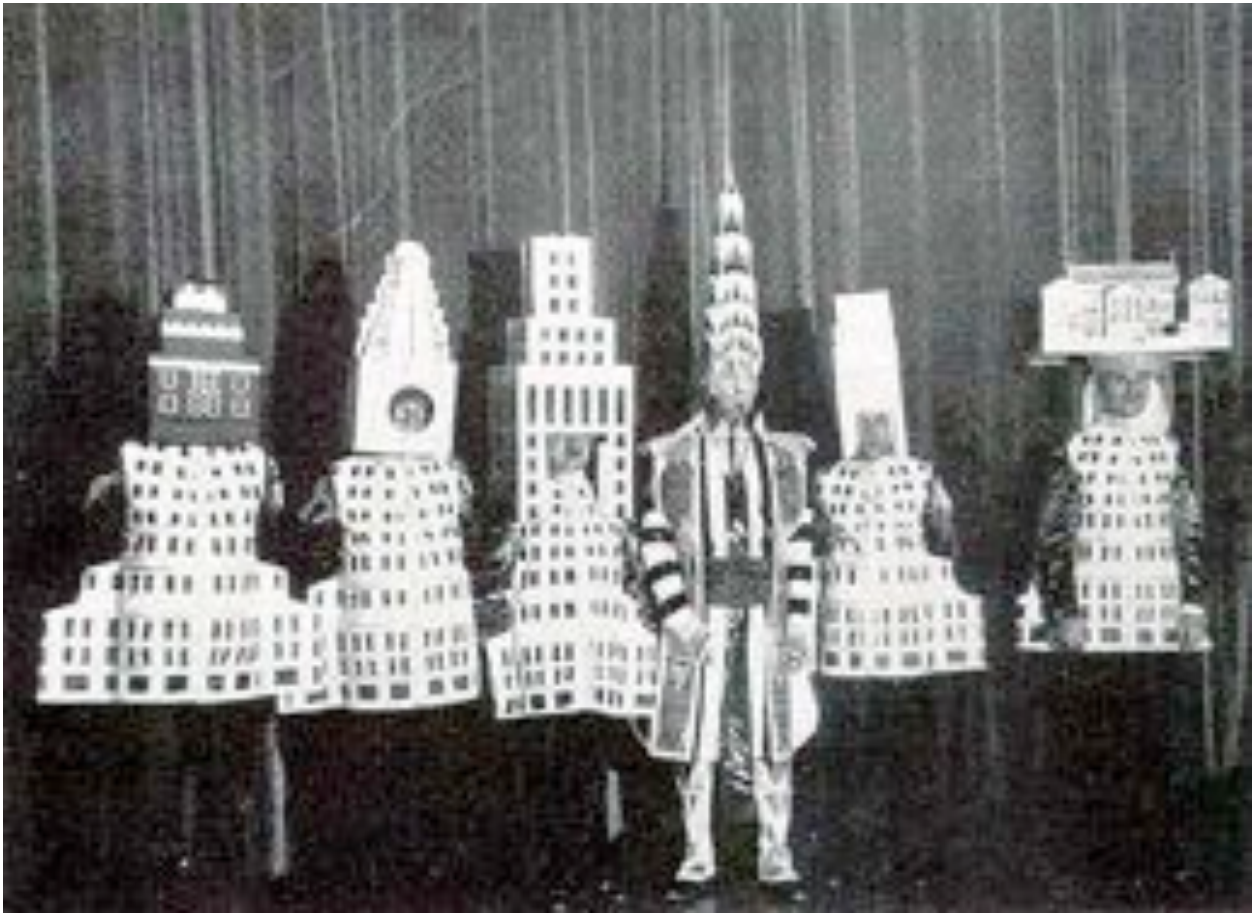


Figure 4. Model of 1999 winning entry for a "TKTS Ticket Booth" by John Choi and Tai Ropiha

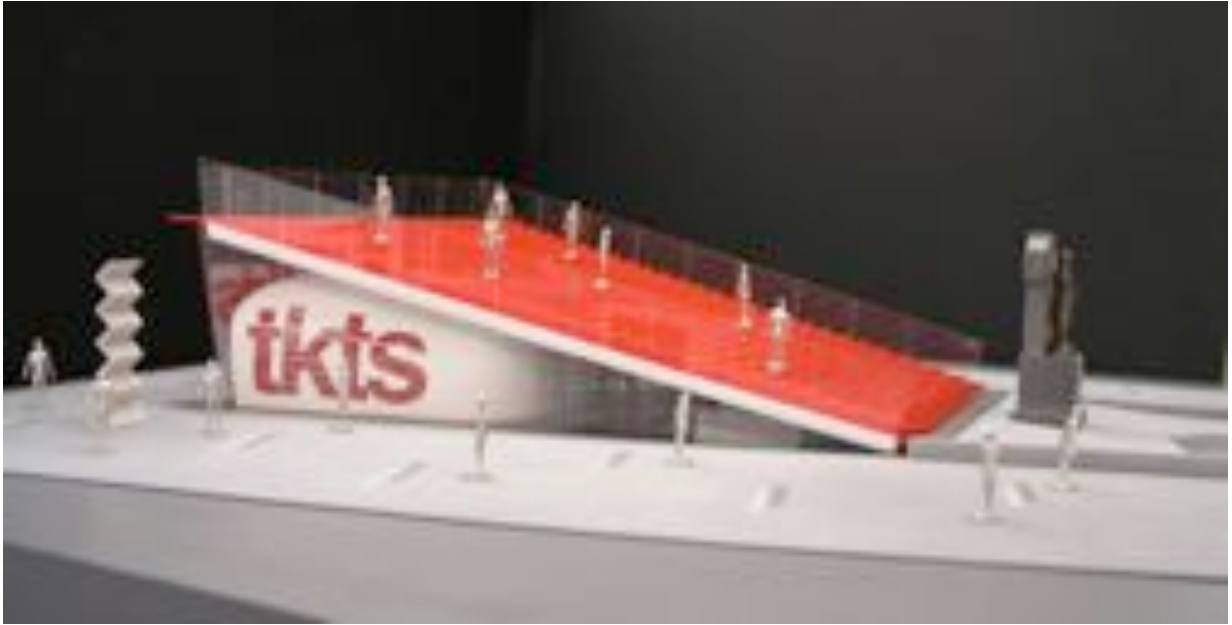


Figure 5. 2005 winning entry for Coney Island "Parachute Pavilion" by Carmody Groarke Hardie



Figure 6. Gateway National Recreation Area site map



Figure 7. Floyd Bennett Field Site Map



Figure 8. Envisioning Gateway jury deliberation



Figure 9. 2007 winning entry for "Envisioning Gateway" competition winner, "Mapping the Ecotone" by Ashley Kelly and Rikako Wakabayashi

