Towards a civic environmental design

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ABSTRACT: A symposium entitled *Designing for Civic Environmentalism*, held important lessons for architects and planners alike concerned with cultural and ecological sustainability. Itself an emerging discourse and practice, civic environmentalism (CE) is, according to William Shutkin, *"the idea that members (stakeholders) of a particular geographic and political community -- residents, businesses, government agencies, and non-profits -- should engage in planning and organizing activities to ensure a future that is environmentally healthy and economically and socially vibrant at the local and regional levels"* (Shutkin 2000). Andrew Light situates the area of concern within the urban environment (Light and Wellman 2003). His aim, while agreeing with Shutkin, is the inclusion of environmental virtues as the governing factor in relationships between persons in a community (civic) and between human and non-humans (ecology) in that same community. In sum, then CE is about the revival and engagement of civic life based on the protection of the environment for all. In this research paper, I describe three tenets for design practice based on civic environmentalism and present a key finding that emerged from my qualitative research (interview, participation, textual review) into the motivations and successful strategies emergent within the workshop. My research revealed that a key characteristic for a design practice based on CE is that the process is best when it works with an *a posteriori* or emergent logic. An *a posteriori* process privileges what is found at the site as the catalyst for development – reframing practice from application to discovery, preservation, and enhancement. By virtue of the local sensitivity it engenders, tempered with knowledge and skills from the outside (a priori), we increase the potential for design to yield the "goods" promised by civic environmentalism - places of ecological and cultural integrity, community, justice, and beauty.

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INTRODUCTION

> "Some deliberately take on work with a strong community orientation: low-income housing, work for minority communities, active participation in local planning issues, design of community centers... These architects recognize that for the built environment to be in good health, a diverse population must have decent places to live, and issues of land use and downtown planning must be appropriately solved for everyone." (Davis 1999:311)

Add to this a concern for ecological integrity and it serves as a reasonable picture of what might be called a "civic environmental design." What this description and most discussions on the subject have lacked is a discussion of method or process – a consideration about how a project is carried out affects the success of the final built environment. The *Designing for Civic Environmentalism Workshop*, held at the University of Texas School of Architecture in the fall of 2003, changed that in two ways. First, it included designers within the community of invited scholars adding disciplinary diversity to the discussion. Second, it included students in an exploratory studio-workshop. Guided by Steven Moore at the University of Texas at Austin, the students were asked to respond to the same set of questions put to the scholars, but to answer with design proposals. The intentionally open but structured process they followed revealed two distinct conceptual approaches that are key in the development of a civically engaged environmental design. I identify them as *a priori* or *conventional* and *a posteriori* or *emergent*. In philosophical thinking, *a priori* justifications are those that are fashioned through reason alone, relying on an inherent correspondence between one's knowledge and facts in the world. In contrast, *a posteriori* justifications are based on or require experiences of the world such that knowledge is contingent on that experience. An *a priori* design process might be one in which the inquiry, range of solutions, and sites for possible projects correspond to the structures and logic found within conventional practice. It is to operate within the normative limits of accepted procedure. *A priori* work finds its basis in the known and circumscribed – the expected. An *a posteriori* design process is one in which the kinds of sites, projects, and order of process are developed in direct response to the context of a *possible* project.

Possible solutions are open-ended in scale, type, duration, and purpose and can lie outside of the specific disciplinary domain of architectural practice. *A posteriori* work is exploratory and emerges from the problem itself, resulting at times with the unexpected. The methodology used was qualitative, consisting of a singular case study informed by participant observation, interview, and textual review. My specific role, relative to the workshop, was as a critic and outside observer who was asked to summarize and contextualize the results of this relatively unique collaboration.

In this paper, I present and contextualize those findings. Beyond this, I have sought since then to extend and further detail these two approaches and their potential as a critique of normative design practice, particularly those attempting to practice with and aim towards sustainability. Further, I make available by these extensions, work, ideas, and specific methods already *in* practice, greatly enhancing the possibility of a robust civic environmental design (or CED).

1. CONTEXT: CIVIC ENVIRONMENTALISM AND ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN

What constitutes civic environmentalism is well-represented by the companion texts in this volume as well as the earlier issue of the *Journal of Social Philosophy* dedicated to the same theme (Light & Wellman 2003). For William Shutkin, from environmental policy and activism, it is "the idea that members (stakeholders) of a particular geographic and political community -- residents, businesses, government agencies, and non-profits -- should engage in planning and organizing activities to ensure a future that is environmentally healthy and economically and socially vibrant at the local and regional levels" (Shutkin 2000). Andrew Light, from environmental ethics, situates the area of concern within the urban environment (Light & Wellman 2003). His aim, while agreeing with Shutkin, is the inclusion of environmental virtues as the governing factor in relationships between persons in a community (civic) and between human and non-humans (ecology) in that same community. In sum, they suggest a revived and engaged civic life that prioritizes the protection of the environment for all.

In architecture, the ideas of civic environmentalism challenge architectural practice to move beyond the predominantly technical discourse of ecology, energy-efficiency, and sustainability. For a civically environmental design, architectural production must be reframed as a specific variety of environmental action. As such it poses a serious ethical and practical challenge to architectural professionals: to be more socially and ecologically engaged as citizen-architects who care for the environmental quality of the communities in which they build, and to be less concerned with the self-reflexive design of aestheticized objects.

The proposals for the design professions put forth by scholars considering civic environmentalism can be reduced to a few categories. Most focused on the civic dimension over the environmental suggesting that perhaps ecological science has yielded a more clear cut sense of what and how to do it. They emphasized that it is the responsibility of architects, planners, and landscape architects to address n their work the issues of: 1) **social justice** for both human and non-human populations including the equal dispensation of rights, representation, and physical space; 2) the creation of **better places,** defined mostly in terms of the maintenance of diversity and enhancement of community through such notions as enhancing street life and battling gentrification; 3) the conservation and maintenance of **local ecologies**; and, 4) the importance of **local knowledge** and the power of **participatory activity** in every project and place. Collectively they also suggested that both a *fidelity to* and respect for the *particularity* of places was central. And, they rested many of their arguments on the importance of direct sensory experience for the care and renewal of concern for places.

The proposals for social justice remained predominantly philosophical providing a sketch of an environmental ethics for designers. Professionals were asked to work towards the benefit of all. A request that extended beyond concern for the poor and disenfranchised to include non-humans who participate in the total ecology of those places. Also, general concern was voiced for a renewed commitment to the notion of the commons (land held to be public) as a kind of "good" that should be given consideration while professionals are engaged with specific proposals, sites, and buildings.

Considered together the proposals recall the statement, made by William Wurster that "architecture is a social art" (Wurster 1960). Much as Andrew Light has sought to move environmental ethics beyond abstract notions about the value of the environment, CED as an art of the social seeks to move beyond adherence to architectural abstractions and into a redefined practice of social *and* environmental concern (Light and Wellman 2003). CED is a practice of care. Based on these ideas, I propose three summary tenets for CED practice: 1) that the built environment, in acting as an agent for the benefit of both humans and non-humans is to preserve and enhance the environment aesthetically, ecologically, functionally, and with respect to history and the specificity of local culture; 2) that because "sites" for projects must be seen as already social, political, and ecological entities, all projects should be understood actually and conceptually as local renovations; and 3) that "programs" can no longer be conceived as free-floating abstract descriptions of economic needs in search of a "site" to appropriate but must be developed in consultation with regard to the specific conditions of the place. Or by extension, that places (sites) may serve as the catalyst for the development of programs most suitable to that place. In what follows we will look at how the two groups of student designers sought to operationalize these tenets.

2. FINDINGS: CIVIC ENVIRONMENTALISM STUDIO WORKSHOP

The studio portion of the workshop began with the critical consideration of texts – an immersion in the theory of civic environmentalism. And with an exploration of the watershed that would serve as the general locale for the as-yet undetermined projects – an immersion into the ecological and cultural conditions of a specific landscape. The students worked as individual designers and in groups. The site was the Boggy Creek watershed and neighborhood in east Austin, Texas. Historically this area has been the site of racial segregation, is marked by and suffers physical neglect, and still has the highest concentration of those living below the poverty line, many of whom are elderly, in the city. It has suffered from work completed by the Army Corp of Engineers to control drainage through the watershed. This work turned the waterway into little more than a drainage ditch and destroyed a potential urban amenity. More recently, it has begun to be the subject of gentrification as the economy of the city has skyrocketed. It is also a place of great natural beauty, deeply held religious belief, old houses, and well-tended gardens.

Initial efforts by the class to get to know the landscape in depth included the production of maps using Geographic Information Systems (GIS), visits to the area, interviews with locals, presentations from community representatives on the culture and ecology of the area, and climate analysis. Their exposure also included lectures on environmental design issues such as micro power, food security among the poor, and urban ecology. Lastly each student was required to adopt an animal that inhabits the city, such as bats, to be given consideration during design.

Eventually they settled into two groups. Each group developed a philosophical position based on the readings that guided the selection of sites, the determination of individual projects, and the style of "renovation" that would be appropriate. The Rosewood group selected the existing Rosewood neighborhood because they felt, after a thorough analysis, it needed to greatest amount of amelioration due to poverty and neglect. They were also captivated by the richness of "cultural and natural resources" that would provide a solid foundation for future work were they able to identify "trouble spots." The Featherlite group chose a mostly abandoned area (a brownfield site) because they felt it best situated for expressions of "appropriate" future development. One such development is the planned location of a light-rail system that would have a stop within their site establishing it as a planned node. Further, Featherlite chose to operationalize their contribution through a consideration of Maslow's "hierarchy of needs" and a sense of what makes a "good city" and a healthy community (Maslow 1968). They based their thinking on abstract universal principles, chose an essentially empty site, and developed individual schemes that would be appropriate and beneficial in many places but which would require being fitted to their site. By contrast, the Rosewood group operationalized their work through an analysis of the life within the neighborhood. They sought the narrative structure that gave local residents a sense of place and in doing so, developed individual projects from *within* that neighborhood and which may not been considered outside of it. Rosewood based their thinking on the specific conditions, which allowed, at least initially, the work to be generated responsively to local conditions.

It can be said that Featherlite sought to *apply* ideals and ideas developed outside of Boggy Creek while Rosewood *drew* their ideas from within it. Where Featherlite engaged in the *production of community* by designing effectively for what may come (more residents and higher land values), Rosewood focused on the *preservation of community* and more directly upon improving upon the existing conditions. Further, and this is a more elusive point to make, for Featherlite, care for residents and the local ecology was treated as a requirement, while with Rosewood, care was implicit within the structure of their narrative approach. The differences between their decisions are significant, not so much for the potential success of the resulting schemes but because they reveal two conceptually distinct possibilities for carrying out civic environmental design.

The Featherlite projects included a grocery store, a transit hub, economic incubator, housing, and a cafe. They were to be located in close proximity to correspond to smart growth principles of densification and a reduction in automobile travel. In this, they are all types of programs that might benefit *any* place as they are based more on satisfying needs considered universal. All were to be new construction on presently undeveloped land. The Rosewood projects consisted of a proposal for animal and non-human habitats in the neighborhood, a neighborhood recycling center, two proposals for waterway restoration, one including an interpretive center, the other a renovation of a neglected housing complex, a neighborhood power generation station and park refurbishment. Most involved improvement of some existing condition. And, overall the emphasis was infrastructural in that the projects were located within and around existing places and addressed more specific needs or "trouble spots," as the group referred to them.

2.1. *A Priori* and *A Posteriori: Method and Agency*

Extrapolated out of the immediacy of the studio, these differences correspond to what I earlier identified as conventional or *a priori* and emergent or *a posteriori*. I think it is significant that they emerged within the context of designers struggling to operationalize the precepts of CED and because these two approaches seem to mesh well with the tenets outlined above. All agreed to and pursued the goals captured in CED #1 and #2 while they differ in terms of #3. Featherlite pursued the more *conventional* or *a priori* approach by developing programs *for* Boggy Creek. While, Rosewood pursued an *emergent* or *a posteriori* one by developing programs *from* the idiosyncratic and specific existing conditions they found at Boggy Creek. Both

were responsive to the place, but utilized different sources and rationale. With the former, the primary source for programs was the designer's ideas informed by architectural discourse, later conditioned to local circumstances. With the latter, the source was the place itself, for which ideas from architectural discourse acted as interpreter.

Thus, *a priori* and *a posteriori*, as methods and rationale for design differ on the source of one's authority and the priority of consideration. With *a priori,* decisions are based on universal structures of meaning and needs, such as how Featherlite used Maslow's formulation to determine, which "needs" were to be met. In contrast, *a posteriori* decisions are based on local structures of meaning and needs, such as how some of the Rosewood designers used interviews with local inhabitants to determine needs. Appropriately, each brings the benefits and limitations associated with the particular knowledge about which I will say more in the conclusion.

More importantly these distinctions also extend to the agency provided by the built environment itself. If we accept the premise that buildings, by safely housing our goods and protecting us during inclement weather, act on our behalf then it follows that the built environment acts as our agent. *A priori* agency, with regard to the built environment, is when a place means to benefit its inhabitants in terms of universal needs and through the application of universally derived codes. Such codes can be that of the "comfortable index," for the United States, between sixty-nine and eighty degrees with fifty percent relative humidity (Olgyay 1963). Or in terms of safety the code might mandate the inclusion of automatic door closers for the control of fire. Those door closers stand in for our human fallibility to not do so in event of emergency. In another sense, universal codes can also be those of taste, style, and/or tradition. Agency of this sort is not site specific and is used most effectively in speculative home "shops" to decide exactly what the "median" income prospective home buyer will be looking for in their new "home." And by home "fashion" magazines such as Dwell, which sell a universal conception of modernist style as an appropriate option everywhere.

Within this framework *a posteriori* agency is the organization of the built environment according to local needs, opportunities, and codes. Here we may also include a door closer, but it is deployed to deal with local conditions such as too many mosquitoes, or perhaps at the request of the owner. This door closer, like the first, stands in for the inhabitants normal role as the closer of doors but does so as a localized and specific response. Official building codes can also be derived in an *a posteriori* fashion. New York City in the wake of the 9/11 attacks has for the first time in its history begun to consider the rewriting of its safety codes for the construction and operation of buildings. There is much hand-wringing as "New York is abandoning many of the intricate restrictions, [that have been] carefully tailored to its quirks and jealously defended over the decades" (Lipton 2004:A21). Lastly, *a posteriori* agency can also be a means by which the built environment is specifically configured to take advantage of local circumstance: A house designed to admit cooling breezes in a hot climate, a well placed window to make visible a framed view, or the choice of limestone as a cladding material because it is contextual or locally available.

What remains to be accomplished is to situate the suggestions of the scholars, the results of the studio project, and my extensions within existing practice. That is where we will turn next.

3. EXTENSION: CASES WITHIN NORMATIVE PRACTICE

Within normative architectural practice, civic environmental design does not, as yet, exist. But aspects of it can be found in many practices and theoretical positions. Most clearly open to the environmental dimension of CED is the ever-enlarging set of practitioners engaged in green, sustainable, or ecological design. For the civic side, particularly when the civic dimension is construed beyond the city to refer to one's duties and obligations in belonging to a community, there are many socially conscious architects who normally engage in issues of low-income housing, diversity, and planning for communities. CED, by first establishing a dialectical relationship between environmental quality and social health, suggests that architecture must go beyond the production of material objects to engage social processes. Second, by expanding the definition of quality to include local ecologies and their non-human inhabitants, CED must be understood as a material, social *and* ecological practice. The designers discussed below each represent facets of that possible practice.

3.1. Michael Pyatok

> "I came to understand that the opinions and experiences of people from the most humble of backgrounds had equal value to those of professionals when shaping cities, neighborhoods, buildings, parks, and in general, the uses of our natural resources" (Pyatok, Personal Choices).

For at least twenty-two years, Michael Pyatok with his firm Pyatok Architects, have been engaged in the design of award-winning urban-based low-income housing for people traditionally excluded from conventional markets, thus fulfilling the model of a socially-conscious (or civically-oriented) design practice. He works to develop intimate connections with future residents and neighbors by working exclusively with non-profit developers (to keep the scale of owner/manager – client ratio intimate) and through his own very effective methods for community participation. "We structure it so that it is an engaging process. We solicit from residents their opinions on how they want to live, what they think about their community. And from neighbors, how they want these new introductions into the community to fit" (Stromberg 2002). Further, Pyatok maintains that the building community is actually the

greatest product of their efforts, a vision of design that encompasses production, financing, and community organization. Nonetheless, he points out that, the "designs of these places send messages... about how much we cared about the people being housed there and how much we care about the neighborhoods... Good design is a sign of respect" (Stromberg 2002).

Pyatok gives us an example of both *a priori* and *a posteriori* methods and agency that enable his own brand of civic design while remaining within the realm of conventional (albeit expanded) practice. The firm is *a priori* in their use of conventional models of housing and in maintaining the standard roles within practice. And they are, *a posteriori*, in their engagement of community participation (to help them think in terms of local needs) and in the resulting built configurations tailored to those needs. The best example to date is a low-income townhome project, named Klahanie, designed for Southeast Asian residents in Issaquah, Washington. Arrangements include "swing rooms" that allow the borrowing of rooms to accommodate extended families, community gardens, details to allow the hanging of foodstuffs on the porch, culturally-meaningful colors, and the right to hang laundry out to dry (Pyatok 2000). All of these required a culturally and civically responsive design and development team. However, for now it remains to be seen whether environmental considerations, understood ecologically will redefine the environment in their environmental justice (Pyatok 1996).

3.2. Rob Wellington Quigley

> "Achieving a fit in the social process of design is even more critical. We must find a way to access the collective ego of those who are impacted by the buildings we design" (Quigley 1996:204).

Originating with his solar residential homes in the 1970s, Quigley and his firm have since established a strong track record of socially conscious conventional design and planning. They have recently begun to more fully embrace sustainable design principles. Quigley has, in a lecture in San Antonio, summed up his interest in the social process of design by referring to it as a "populist-enabled" method of maintaining "artistic authority." It is about "achieving the fit" between the built environment and those who will experience it. "We enjoy working with the community to solicit their input. We are comfortable coordinating the desires of a multiple client group that can include City staff, elected officials, civic groups and agencies, and community members" (Quigley). His most notable early achievement along these lines was the design of the first new single-room only (SRO) hotel in San Diego in seventy years as a response to a local social need (the rising number of homeless) he identified in conjunction with developers Chris Mortenson & Bud Fischer. His firm went beyond design, engaging the city in the production of new ordinances to make it possible. As a traditional project, it is a good building built cheap fitting between social need, financial means, and political reality. More importantly it represents an emergent model for practice in that a geographically specific need served as the origin of the project. This practice has continued more recently in the development of a parking garage for a college campus which Quigley planned for new programmatic elements as a way to develop life in the area. Uncharacteristic for an architect, Quigley has acted as the developer seeking tenants for which he will also serve eventually as architect.

Quigley supplies us with an example of both *a priori* and *a posteriori* methods and agency enabling his civic (and emerging environmental) design. Much of their effort lies in reinterpreting many (*a prior)* programs in specific relation to the community and site (*a posterirori*). These "design paradoxes," as Quigley refers to them, provide the source for the richness of the work leading to projects not only fitted to their clientele (as with Pyatok), but projects that are more effective and unexpected. The SRO's became dignified housing, the parking garage – a social place, and his Solana Beach Transit Station – a mixed-use project that includes low-cost housing, artists lofts, a restaurant, and retail shops. Quigley fills in the gaps between people and place by including them within the decision-making process and by expanding the architect's role to include politics, activism, and development. The built environment and the methods used to achieve it, enable residents to belong to their place. As for his environmental stance, we will also need to wait and see to what extent it becomes a full dimension of their work. Ideally, Quigley's sense of environmental responsibility will be something he brings to every circumstance just as he brings a sense of civic pride.

3.3. Samuel Mockbee and the Rural Studio

> "Architecture won't begin to alleviate all of these social woes. But what is necessary is a willingness to seek solutions to poverty in its own context, not outside it... with knowledge based on human contact and personal realization applied to the work and place" (Lindsey 2003: 63)

The Rural Studio, the late Samuel Mockbee's educational project, continues to benefit the residents of Hale County, Alabama, one of the poorest in the United States. Begun in 1992 with twelve University of Auburn architecture students the program has since evolved to include over four hundred students. To date they have completed approximately forty projects ranging from renovations, to ball fields to single-family housing.

Throughout its history the students have engaged in both *a priori* and *a posteriori* design and providing both kinds of agency – giving people "warm, dry, and noble" places to live but and also projects that have allowed residents to live according to local understanding, conditions, and meanings. All work is aimed at the mitigation of the kinds of social injustice closest to the concerns of architecture – the *a priori*: poverty,

substandard housing; and the *a posteriori*: the relationship to a specific land, and the relationship to a place which serves as a source of values. Through the production of mostly dignified and dignifying private housing, the Rural Studio, like Pyatok, has stuck to the satisfaction of *a priori* needs but transformed those abstract ideas, as stated on their website, "into workable solutions forged by real human contact, personal realization, and a gained appreciation for the culture." Thus, their ultimate goal was an *a posteriori* process and agency summed up above and in their mission statement, again from the website: “The Rural Studio seeks solutions to the needs of the community within the community's own context, not from outside it.” Over time they have achieved this and the Rural Studio's primary mission, "the education of *citizen architects*" in which the students learn civic responsibility and participation as the virtue of practice (Lindsey 2003). By becoming integral with the community they have enabled their *a posteriori* approach. "Instead of encountering sites, clients, and building as abstractions, students in Newbern grapple with all directly" leading to projects that stem from within the community and which aim at enabling local ways of life, such as the construction of Shepard Bryant's Smokehouse for curing his daily catch and the oversized porches for daily life (Forney 2003).

Environmentalism at the Rural Studio is a low-key issue caught up mostly in the direct consideration of climate, energy efficiency, daylighting, and rainwater catchment. Their particular focus is on the use of recycled materials including the testing of a variety of cast-off materials for unconventional uses such as discarded carpet samples and baled corrugated boxes as exterior cladding and insulation. Further, while it explores these "building methods that foster responsible resource use," organizers admit that the program and the work are "not as sustainable as many wish"(Forney 2003). As time goes by, more and more students are likely to embrace ecological principles as they have shown ample skill with environmental justice.

3.4. Walter Hood

> "I am interested in how the everyday mundane practices of life get played out in cities, the unheralded patterns that take place without celebration" (Brown 2004).

Landscape architecture has of late had an increasingly intimate relationship with ecological values. Its longer relationship is with providing settings for activity and contemplation. Accordingly there has been a variety of established garden or park types through American history from the pleasure grounds that served as refuges for city dwellers to the recreational facilities for weekend ball games and cook-outs (Cranz 1982). Walter Hood's eleven-year-old practice contributes the best of this history to outdoor landscapes of neglect within the heart and at the edges of low-income neighborhoods. His site is Oakland, California. In bringing these *a priori* models from landscape history he relies on an *a posteriori* process to bring them to fruition, a process he refers to as "improvisation." Hood's goal is to develop settings that thrive in the city by best fitting both the present and future needs of a specific neighborhood and which re-establish forgotten or neglected city spaces. Serving as an advocate for the community he engages in historical – almost archaeological – research in order to interpret forgotten local history and community context. He has extensive conversations with neighborhood residents. And he engages in participant observation of the everyday uses and flows within and through the place. "Most people would simply see things Walter observes and ignore them... He sees the guy who comes and hangs out at the park as someone who enriches the experience of being there," says Randy Hester, a colleague (Brown 2004). Often he is seeking idiosyncracies that mark the place as special seeking to provide venues for constant daily activity. His Lafayette Park project, for instance, includes a shaded plaza for Tai Chi, a raised knoll which recalls an observatory that once occupied the site, barbeque pits, an underground fountain, play equipment, and a resurrected horseshoe pit. It is a park that appears to offer something for everyone.

His work, while predominantly civic is also ecologically driven. All of his ten Oakland park projects are restorations of one sort or another. Whether it is a stream restoration in Fruitvale, brownfield reclamation, or simply the cleaning up of a trashed lot, his projects better the ecological and cultural life of the city and the particular neighborhood. His work combines, in a unique and locally inflected way, economy and environmental justice through revitalization, and aesthetics and ecology through design.

3.5. Peter & Anneliese Latz

> "We understand avant-garde landscape architecture... as a translation of abstract ideas, ideas of nature, ecology, and society... The site itself and ecological programs are forming the spaces of the future" (Latz and Partner).

Peter & Anneliese Latz have produced provocative and well-known works by adapting the concepts of the *Volkspark* (people's park) and the ecological park to post-industrial landscapes. Developed in Germany in the early 20th century, the *Volkspark* was intended to provide city residents places for active recreation. Ecological parks by contrast serve to improve a city's ecological health by providing oxygen, cleaner air & water, and diverse habitats and are often didactic educating the public about healthy ecosystems. They focus these transformative efforts on "the renewal of destroyed and often contaminated sites" (Latz and Partner). These are essentially found places that require ecological, aesthetic, functional, and historical restoration. The resulting works are designed to benefit local populations by providing a place of either respite or active recreation, and by respecting the site's cultural heritage. To achieve these works it required a shift from their earlier more conventional *a priori* approach to an

emergent *a posteriori* one.
Illustrating this shift with regard to the design of the Hafeninsel Park in Saarbrucken, Latz states, "We made plans for an English garden and for a formal garden. We worked through all the clichés and then put them in the trash" (Lubow 2004). Instead, for the bombed-out and derelict port they excavated remnants of the old coal dock, existing foundations, and other found materials and produced a historically rich new park. Saarbrucken proved to be a pilot project for their more well-known and larger Landschaftpark Duisburg-Nord which has framed their practice to date. Occupying several miles along the Emscher River, Duisburg-Nord sits amid blast furnaces, slag heaps, and defunct railroad tracks all of which remain providing the spatial structure for the park. Maintaining the industrial carcass of the plant lends its visitors and neighbors an *a posteriori* agency by allowing them to participate in present activities and the past simultaneously. The plant which was so much of the life of the area remains and has been made eerily attractive by planting and excavation. Minor interventions and careful planning mark the Latz' brand of *a posteriori* design. Cooling tanks have become lily ponds, ore bunkers edge garden plots, railroad grades serve as paths, and piles of carcinogenic compounds are sculpted to discourage trespassing but left open to naturally bio-remediate. Their work presents a comprehensive civic environmental model for the future by combining, in an attractive fashion, ecological restoration and social benefit. Latz & Partners work here easily fulfills all three of the CED tenets proposed above providing a complete example of environmental design as a local "renovation".

3.6. Stefan Behnisch

> "… to attempt to create a architecture in response to the various aspects of context, where culture, urbanism, and concerns related to sustainability are incorporated in a seamless manner" (Behnisch, Behnisch, and Partner).

The work of Stefan Behnisch within the firm of Behnisch, Behnisch & Partner (BB&P) produces work that is well known for its dedication to sustainable principles, urbanism, and humane environments. They are a predominantly conventional firm in structure and method, but manage to produce works specifically tailored to key features of their locale and flows of energy through the site. Put differently, BB&P uses an *a priori* approach and techniques to achieve *a posteriori* agency. Beginning with the Institute for Forestry and Nature Research in the Netherlands, their civic and environmental commitments have been expressed most fully in the Nordeutsche Landesbank (Nord/LB) in Hanover, Germany, and in the recently completed Genzyme headquarters in Cambridge, Massachusetts.
Each of these projects employs an almost uniform and comprehensive set of technical strategies to satisfy their sense of environmental responsibility. These include: daylighting and the redirection of natural light to reduce the need for artificial lighting, double-shell cladding systems and atria for the control of the interior microclimate (summer cooling and winter heating), sun shading, geo-thermal cooling, thermal mass, active solar for the generation of power, the use of recycled and local building materials, and landscaped roofs. However, this *a priori* approach is clearly aimed at achieving a specific fit within the energy flows at that particular site and relative to the specific activities to be housed there.
The civic contributions, on the other hand come in a wide variety of forms with each variation aimed, again at achieving a fit appropriate to the locale. Within the examples cited above these include: some democratic participation (by future inhabitants) in design, buildings that contribute aesthetically to the cityscape in form and color, buildings that provide high-quality public space at the ground floor (a sort of modern arcade), and buildings which minimize consumed and embodied energy to the benefit of local society as a whole, and buildings which provide its staff varying degrees of control. Moreover, there lies the potential for a fuller CED as Stefan Behnisch continues to develop the firm. As he stated in preparation for a symposium entitled *Ecological Architecture as part of The Concert of Architectural Tasks*: "Ecology is not a separate topic... The ecological value of a building depends to a large extent on the approach of the users to their built environment... The rhythms of nature have almost fallen into disuse. Instead of considering them a nuisance and a source of reduced comfort in our civilized world, people could again be made aware of these rhythms."

4. PROVISIONAL CONCLUSIONS

To begin it must be made clear that a design practice based on civic environmentalism, in the fullness captured in this volume, remains elusive at present. So, I must amend an earlier statement. While nothing called civic environmental design exists as of yet, it is clear that there is ample precedent for its establishment within existing normative architectural practices. Full implementation will require consideration of ideas I have summarized and more research into the possibilities latent within this emerging discourse. The foundation of a civic environmental design is the merger of civic and ecological concern. The examples above suggest that this merger remains the primary impediment. Each would benefit from a fuller synthesis of both their civic or environmental commitments. Those practices whose focus is the civic/social dimension would benefit from a more thorough embrace of the ecological dimension. And, those focused on ecology, sustainability, and "green" concerns would find balance through greater concern for social justice and cultural meaning. A civic environmental design is inherently democratic, socially engaged, ecologically informed (including care for non-human populations), and aesthetically skilled. The objects of its production are likewise socially beneficial, ecologically sound, and capable of being understood as

beautiful all within a local community. Moreover, it relies on processes that are in sync with these goals.

For this, I have concluded that the concepts, *a priori* and *a posteriori* that should be thought as dialectically interrelated. Each serves to balance the weakness of the other. A process characterized by *a priori* consideration is weak in that it tends to result in applied or conventional solutions but strong in that it embodies collective cultural knowledge. A process characterized by *a posteriori* consideration is weak in the reliance on local circumstances for solutions (i.e. Quigley's "fit" may never be ecological, unless asked for by the community), but is strong by its responsiveness to those local conditions (Light 2002). Further, *a priori* can guard against naive localism (prejudice, narrow-mindedness, provincialism) by maintaining codes and norms that emerge from outside of the particulars. And, *a posteriori,* by focusing on specific sites as the source of "programs" favors a "closer" or more well matched renovation.

Certainly any good practice derives its robustness from an appropriate blend of considerations. But I will maintain that at present *a priori* justification, process, and agency remains dominant in contemporary practice limiting the full potential of a civically environmental practice. And, further, that for CED abstract principles must always be tempered and conditioned by local opportunities. The benefits of *a posteriori* justification, process, and agency are clear. By focusing concern on the local it aids in establishing connections between local citizens and their local environment, thereby encouraging ecological citizenship in them and in the professionals who guide them. Further, by virtue of the local sensitivity it engenders, tempered with knowledge and skills from the outside, we increase the potential for design to yield the "goods" promised by civic environmentalism - places of ecological integrity, community, justice, and beauty.

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