

Noble Cumming // *Toxic Chemicals*

September 5, 2010 // Global Problematique





The tried and true idiom “The Elephant in the Room” reminds us of what is in plain view, yet we choose not to see. Things like Global Warming and Peak Oil or even Rainforest Destruction are very obvious problems with clear-cut consequences. These issues encourage us to think big and concentrate on one thing at a time. However, the issues of Persistent Organic Pollutants and Biomagnification are more like “The Cockroaches in the Room”: Every once and awhile you see one but hundreds more sit just out of sight. They are in everything and capable of making you really sick, but half the time, you don’t even know to look for them. Their collective weight and mass is equal to that of an elephant, but you may never know that because you’ll never see them all at once.



Many of us are already familiar with (and worried about) several hot button chemicals, like Lead, Mercury, DDT, and Dioxin. In the POPs treaty, signed in 2004 and already enforced to varying degrees globally, the international community has agreed on banning what they consider to be the 12 most dangerous chemicals:¹

DDT

An insecticide/pesticide used in agriculture and to combat malaria. Airborne DDT has a half life of 2 days. DDT in soil has a half life of 2-15 years. It was banned in the U.S. in 1972. Minor exposure can result from eating contaminated foods, but the majority of contamination occurs through direct exposure. DDT almost universally effects reproduction in animals and humans, even in low doses. High doses can cause seizures.⁵

Aldrin & Dieldrin

An insecticide/pesticide used extensively in corn and cotton and banned in the US in 1974. Exposure happens mostly from eating contaminated foods such as fish, root crops, dairy or meat. People who live in homes that were once treated with aldrin for termites can also be exposed. Repeated exposure over long periods of time can damage the nervous system. Aldrin quickly breaks down into Dieldrin in the environment, but the two cause the same effects.^{2,3}

Endrin

A substance used to control a variety of pests. Exposure usually occurs through the consumption of contaminated foods. Endrin can stay in soil for up to 10 years but tends to cling to the bottom sediments of water, thereby reducing the chances of water-based contamination. Fish can (via biomagnification) still have high levels of the chemical. Short term, high level doses can cause severe damage to the central nervous system and even death. Long term, low level exposure has so far yielded no health effects.⁶

Chlordane

A pesticide used in corn, citrus, and home gardens before 1988 and banned in the US in 1988. It sticks strongly to soil particles and is unlikely to contaminate groundwater. It does, however, evaporate in the air and people can be exposed to it by breathing air or touching soil. Exposure will effect the nervous system and the digestive system. Long term exposure has harmful effects on the liver.⁴

Heptachlor

An insecticide used commercially until 1988. It is still used for fire ant control in underground power transformers. Exposure usually occurs through the consumption of contaminated foods, but can occur through contaminated drinking water. There is currently no reliable information on the health effects of Heptachlor on humans. However, animals have had liver damage and a loss in fertility. It has also been classified as a possible human carcinogen.⁷

Mirex

Used for Fire Ant control and as a flame retardant (!) it was banned from use in the U.S. in 1978. Exposure usually occurs through the consumption of contaminated foods, but can also occur through the handling of contaminated soil. Little is known about it's health effects in humans, but in animals it can cause a myriad of health problems. It is also thought to possibly be a carcinogen (thought?! possibly?!...)⁸

Hexachlorobenzene

A fungicide, used to protect onion seeds and various grains, it was also used to make fireworks, ammunition and synthetic rubber. Exposure usually comes through contaminated food, water, or soil and even working in certain factories (it is actually an industrial by-product). Health effects include severe damage to the liver, nervous system, immune and endocrine systems, and the stomach. It is believed to be cancerous.¹¹

Toxaphene

A secret sauce of over 670 chemicals, it was an insecticide used heavily for cotton production and to kill off unwanted fish in lakes(!). Exposure generally occurs through the consumption of contaminated fish or shellfish or by breathing air near hazardous waste sites. It can effect the lungs, nervous system and kidneys.⁹

Dioxins

Industrial by-products which are produced during chlorination or bleaching processes in waste water plants, paper mills, and incinerators. They generally collect in waterways and attach themselves to soil where they begin the process of biomagnification. Exposure occurs through the consumption of meat, dairy, or fish. Skin contact with pesticides can contribute. Health effects most commonly include Chloracne, a skin disease and liver damage. It effects the immune system and the WHO considers it a known carcinogen.¹²

Polychlorinated Biphenols (PCBs)

Another secret sauce of up to 209 chlorinated compounds, they were used as coolants or lubricants in electrical equipment. Exposure occurs in every manner possible; from contaminated fish to well water and even when you run older-model electrical appliances (through skin exposure of airborne molecules). Health effects include liver damage and skin conditions like rashes.¹⁰

Furans

Another by-product, furans are a family of chemicals often found with dioxins. The CDC and the EPA focus on Benzofuran which is created during petrochemical refinement. It is most often used in a resin in paints and food packaging(!). Exposure occurs by direct touch, but also through smoking(?) and eating foods packaged with materials that include the resin(!?!?!?!). Health effects show a strong potential for liver and kidney damage and cancer. It has not been officially classified as a carcinogen.¹³

Unfortunately, the POPs treaty barely scratches the surface of this looming issue. According to a National Geographic article published in 2006, there are roughly 82,000(!) chemicals currently in use in the U.S. and an average of 1,700(!) new industrial compounds are reviewed by the EPA each year. However, the overwhelmingly majority of these won't even get the safety testing they deserve. This is due to the Toxic Substance Control Act, passed in 1976 by both the House and Senate and signed into law by Gerald Ford. Largely intended to address and prevent further hot-button issues of the time (like PCBs) it also stipulates that new chemicals submitted for review will be tested and potentially regulated (or banned) if the EPA finds "unreasonable risk to human health or the environment".¹⁴ That means, new (and existing) chemicals are tested only if there is a relationship found between the presence of a compound and a health or environmental problem. Come again? Yes. They'll only test it, if somebody gets sick.¹⁵



Take, for instance, **PBDE**. A widely used fire retardant, is now being found everywhere on the planet, most notably in breast milk. But we have little information as to what it can do to our health. Speaking of breast milk, due to biomagnification, breast milk is packed full of toxic chemicals. An unnerving thought considering that breast feeding is considered the best option for infants.¹⁶

Other findings are equally troubling:
“From the early 1980s through the late 1990s, autism increased tenfold; from the early 1970s through the mid-1990s, one type of leukemia was up 62 percent, male birth defects doubled, and childhood brain cancer was up 40 percent... There’s little firm evidence (to link these to man-made chemicals). But over the years, one chemical after another that was thought to be harmless turned out otherwise once the facts were in.”¹⁷



Average concentration (p.p.b.) of PBDE in bivalves in U.S. coastal waters. (source: noaa.gov)

Arguably, the most famous example is lead. Once thought to be perfectly safe, it is now a chemical bogeyman, influencing everything from pre-natal diets to foreign policy. We assume that lead is only an external problem at this point, with doses coming to us from swordfish or Chinese toys, rather than the peeling paint we heard about in the 70s. The truth is that lead is everywhere in the environment. Because it lingers in the soil, a recent N.Y. Times article cited a growing problem with urban community gardens and lead contamination. Not only a result of lead-based paint, it also comes from leaded gasoline, lead plumbing and lead-based pesticides. That means lead is in our food, our dirt, our houses, on the roadside, in the city and in the country. It knows no economic barriers, being found in concentrations just as high in the neighborhoods of the rich as the poor. A study done recently in SUNY Syracuse, "found lead concentrations as high as 65,000 p.p.m. in the yards of upscale homes." To give some perspective, The EPA advises cleanup at 400 p.p.m. Minneapolis considers 100 p.p.m. hazardous and The Netherlands considers 40 p.p.m. too much.¹⁸



Lead paint chips in the gut of a 2-year old Cleveland girl.
(Photograph by Peter Essick)

When looking at the lead example, remind yourself that this is only one case. It's use has been widely recognized as dangerous for 30 years and it's use has been largely eradicated from our society. But, it remains a health threat. Now assume that the 12 chemicals found earlier in this paper are just as invasive. That's 13 different industrially produced products that have different effects on our body and linger for generations after their use. Now add the United Nation's *chemicals of concern*¹⁹ that do not appear on the POPs treaty:

Hexachlorohexane

Organic Lead Compounds

Nonylphenols

Polyaromatic Hydrocarbons

Phthalates

Atrazine

Endosulphan

Pbdes

Short-Chain Chlorinated Paraffins

Pentachlorophenol

Chlordecone

PFOs

Organic Mercury Compounds

Octylphenols

Hexabromobiphenyl

Organic Tin Compounds

That's 28 chemicals that are considered global threats to human health. Of these 28, the most information exists, but even these numbers are incomplete and disjointed. Now, let's remind ourselves that in the U.S. alone, there are 82,000 man-made chemicals in use. Most of which their very creators know little about. In almost every other bullet point in the "Global Problematique" the problems are well defined and the data prolific and well communicated. The issue of toxic chemicals in the environment is, however, lacking in even the most fundamental data. Yet, over and over, former "wonder chemicals" go from being wonderful to making everybody wonder why anybody would be so stupid as to use this stuff. As long as we're in the dark, we will continue to play "catch-up" with our safety, compromising our lives and the lives of future generations.



Thank you.

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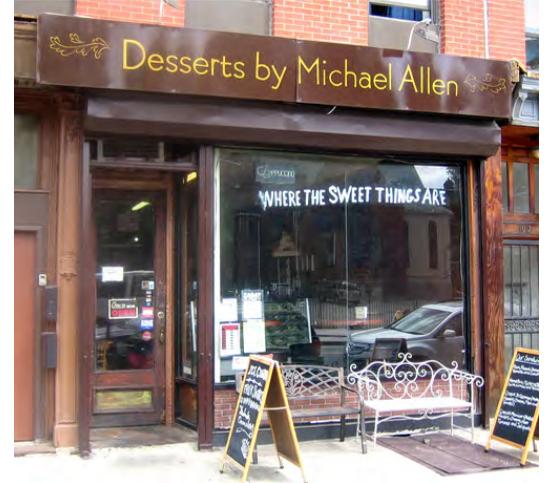
Noble Cumming // Sustaining Desserts By Michael Allen

September 26, 2010 // Sustainable Business Plan



Introduction

As a 2nd generation Afro-American Baker and Pastry Chef in Brooklyn, and trained by your father, you are part of a special class of bakers that never went to culinary school. This enables you to retain a sense of quality and traditional craftsmanship, largely gone from today's dessert-chef culture. On top of that, your background as a Designer and never ending love for the arts, means you are experimenting with flavors and presentation methods that most bakers can't even conceive of. In other words, you sell a lot of yummy things that nobody's ever heard of. Many of which are destined to be classics...



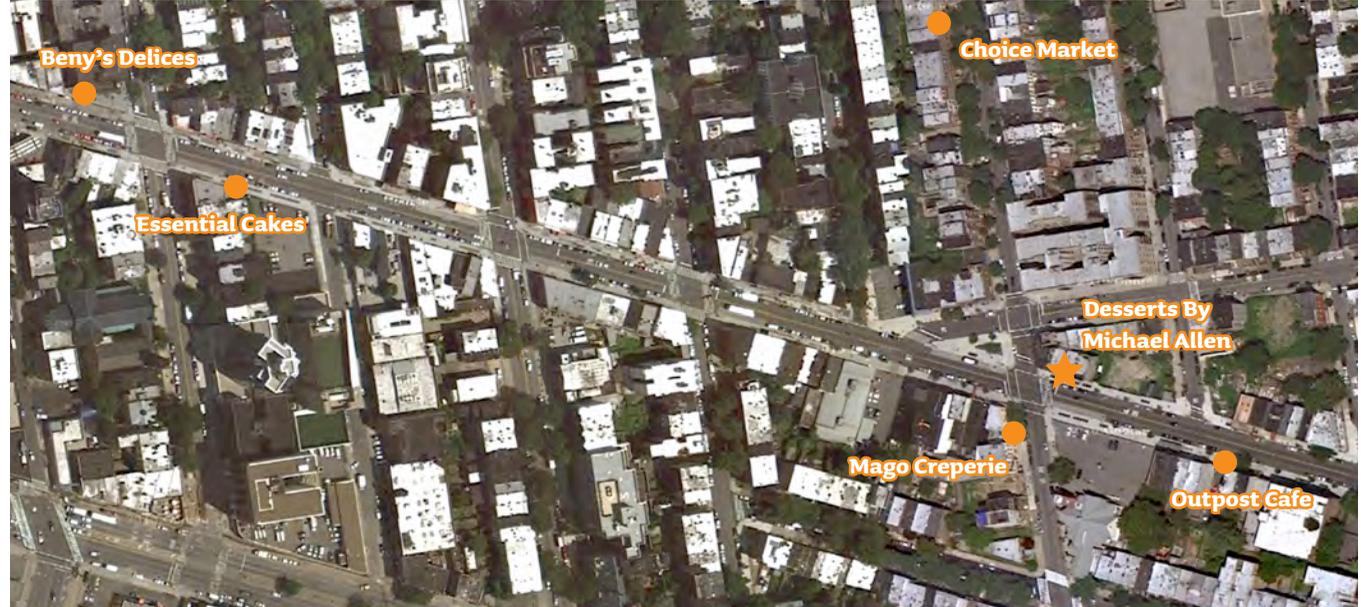
The Market

What a time to be here, a catalyst in the re-birth of Clinton Hill and the Fulton corridor!

“A neighborhood is just like a human body: if you don’t nourish it, it will die,” you were quoted in NYDailyNews.com¹ last month, It is clear that you are doing your part to nourish the soul of this neighborhood.

As change occurs and local investment increases, the bakery will probably see sales increase in pace with growth. Your reviews on *Yelp* and *Brownstoner* already point to this, but how far can growth really go?

Naturally, it can’t go on forever, but I have strong reason to believe that *Market Saturation* may soon occur. Within 5 minutes walking distance from the bakery, there are two bakeries and two cafés with large assortments of pastries, baked goods and desserts. Probably the worst is that just 100 feet away, there is a Creperie serving pastries from a neighborhood competitor. Though they cannot replicate your product, they can lure clientele away for a variety of reasons, so long as their offerings are just good enough.



“The best defense is a good offense.”
–Jack Dempsey

The Mission

Make “Desserts by Michael Allen” the first totally sustainable bakery in Clinton Hill...

Increase Your Market Share

Our neighborhood has a lot of sophisticated “foodies” who seek organic foods as a rule. You are currently cutting yourself off from this group and their dollars. They should be your main objective.

Differentiate Yourself

None of the other bakers in the area are actually sustainable. *Mago* and *Choice* come close, listing several local and organic sources, but that is only one piece of the sustainable pie. Michael Allen should own the title of “Sustainable Baker” and force the competition to follow.

Mitigate Your Overhead

Property values are still going up here, so are utility costs. Striving to release yourself from “the Grid” by reducing your intake needs will help your business both survive and thrive, while others are forced to raise their prices or fail.

“Brick and Mortar”



Rebuild the Front Facade

Install large bay windows or a glass garage door (they're quite hip in Chelsea right now). This will give the bakery 3 strengths:

1. More seating in the Summer
2. Increased Air Circulation when open (takes pressure off the A/C too)
3. An interesting Facade can be a Business Draw



Curb Water Usage

1. Low Flow Aerators are wonderful little devices that attach to the end of your sink faucets. They are proven to decrease your water usage by 40% and decrease heating costs by as much as 50%.²
2. Install a Dishwasher. A full load uses only half the energy, one-sixth of the water, and less soap than hand-washing, and the time and energy saved can be put back into other tasks.³



3. Low Flow Toilets are as inexpensive as standard toilets and also as easy to install and can reduce your flush usage by about half. If you don't want to junk your current model, you can add bricks or bottles filled with sand or water.⁴

“Brick and Mortar”



Install Ultra Efficient Appliances

Your display case and your beverage cooler are both very old and should be replaced sooner rather than later. Specifically, commercial glass-front beverage coolers are notoriously inefficient and are intended to go in Liquor Stores, not high-end Bakeries. They don't even qualify for Energy Star. Get an Energy Star rated fridge and watch your bottom line go down.⁵



Hang Thermal Curtains

Throughout the Winter, these curtains will significantly reduce heat loss along the windows and doors, especially at the bakery's main entrance. They can be made by a local seamstress, saving you from having them shipped thousands of miles.

Use Insulation Blankets

Make your energy efficient appliances even more efficient. 25 to 45% more with hot water heaters, where they are most commonly used.⁷



“Landscape”

Plants, aside from being pleasing on the eye, will keep the inside air reasonably fresh during the Winter and can be used to define the boundaries of the Cafe in the Summer.

“Product”



Go Organic

In today's sophisticated urban environment, organic foods are in high demand. In fact, 54% of shoppers in the U.S. prefer organic foods. Now, clearly this can't always work in a neighborhood with such high overhead, but at the very least, understand that there are a lot of shoppers in Clinton Hill, whom shop only organic and have grown to expect it in their lives. Currently, they are not your customers.⁸



Go Local

Sourcing locally raised and produced food products is an important part of being sustainable. Of course, not everything you use can be sourced locally (i.e. chocolate) but what can should be no farther away from the bakery than a leisurely day's drive. Buying local, significantly reduces the carbon footprint of your food, but also serves several other functions.

1. It establishes a story for the customer



2. It establishes a very high level of quality control between you and purveyors.
3. It allows you to get out of NYC a couple of times a year “on business”. You need it.

Go to the local Farmer's Market and start establishing relationships. Most of the vendors are wholesalers too and will be happy to work with you. There is also a Wholesale Green Market next to the regular NYC wholesale market center in the Bronx.⁹ It's a bit of a trip, but worth going.

“Product”



Reusable In/Recyclable Out

Currently, everything the food and beverages are served in are disposable. This cost cannot be recovered. If you change the facade and/or install a dishwasher (see “Brick and Mortar”) having plates, cups and silverware will bring significant savings to the business over the course of the year. Likewise, having recyclable/eco friendly take-out pieces, will serve as a “badge” for your soon to be acquired “savvy” customers, giving them another reason to support your business.



Compost Your Food Waste

Many of your purveyors will appreciate the free organic matter and may even give you a deal on your order in exchange for the stuff. There will be organic waste that can't go into a regular compost pile, that will need to go into an industrial compost. A service like the Mr.T Carting Corporation¹⁰ will provide pickup service and industrially compost any food scrap you give them.

“Community”



E-Car Pickup

An electric car or a hybrid will cost as much or less than a high-end SUV and will save you a bundle on gas. It also tells the people you drive past that you and your bakery care about their community and the world.

Bicycle Drop-off

You are an avid bike rider. Bring your “DNA” to the shop, like you do your artistic side. It will feel more personal to your clients and serve as a great stress reliever for the staff.

twitter



Optimize Through Twitter

Tell your loyal followers when the bread is fresh, or when you’re making your signature fruit tortes. They will have the inside track and that will make them feel more appreciated.

Tell the Customer How they’re Helping

If the cookie in the case is organic, put a label on it. The same goes for a cooler that uses 20% less electricity. Let them know they are helping the world through their food choices and they will feel good about buying your product.



Be Transparent about Your Sources

People feel empowered when they know where their food comes from. People also look for the products they trust. Many local restaurants (like Mago) are already doing this and it serves as a consumer draw.

Grow the Family

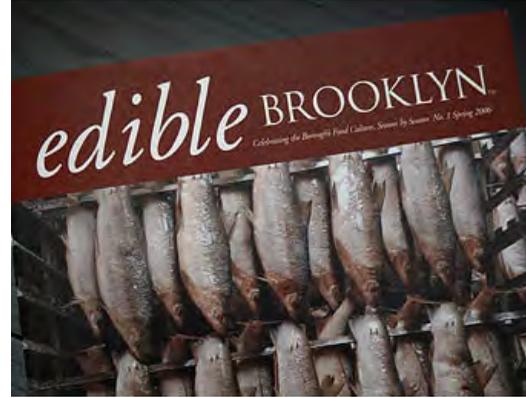
Everybody who is an actual employee at the bakery is a member of your family, except one. Pull him in, by giving him the resources he needs to live independently and manage the day-to-day operations of the shop.

“Community”



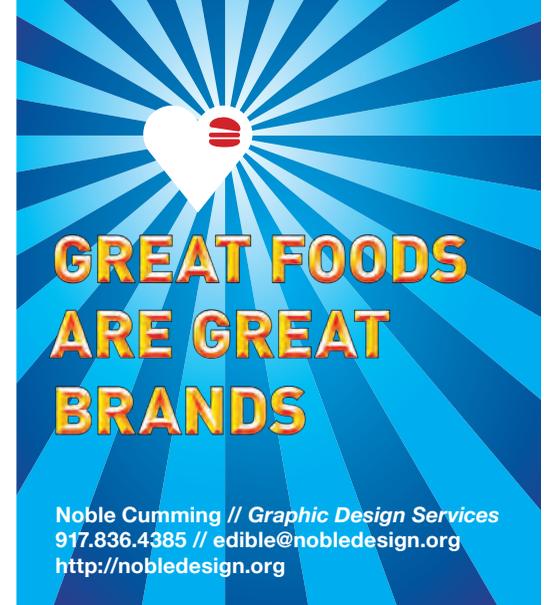
Develop Partnerships

Develop bakery-driven dessert menus for a number of restaurants up and down Fulton Street because a bunch of small accounts can be as profitable as a large one and much more visible. Even the GreeneHill Food Coop around the corner, won't be a large account when it opens, so change this market into an opportunity. It's also possible that some of the places you source from would want to sell your creations that feature their ingredients. Think of the potential of barter.



For God's Sake, Advertise!

Tell the world what you're doing for them. Edible Brooklyn¹¹ is a widely read publication that caters to “foodies” in the borough, with restaurant reviews and vendor showcases. According to their most recent media statistics, estimated circulation is 100,000 and most readers polled state that they read the magazine cover to cover, keeping back issues as a directory. Edible Manhattan and Edible Queens are also great resources. Even I advertise in Edible Brooklyn!



In Closing...

One of the nice things about working with you is that there is practically a blue sky of possibilities out there. Another nice thing, is that we think alike, so new ideas will translate easily between us. Lastly, I am in your bakery all the time and I'll be around tomorrow, voting for you with my dollars. Through your successes and failures, I will be there to answer if any of my ideas go south.

We are like family, and that is the basis of a community. Thank you.

Thank you.

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Noble Cumming //

Redesigning Atlantic Avenue

November 28, 2010 // Community Redesign



Introduction

Atlantic Avenue is a historically important commercial street, running east to west across the entire borough of Brooklyn and into Queens. The Avenue was always a center of commerce with side streets such as mine (Lefferts Place) being home to carriage houses and whatnot that serviced the people working in the area. The space around Atlantic was originally quite desirable too, with many of Brooklyn's first Wealthy Industrialists owning Brownstone mansions there. The roadway is today a fraction of its original size, having at one time stretched as far east as Hicksville, Long Island (about 30 miles). Atlantic Avenue is also home to one of New York's oldest rail lines and what some claim to be the world's first subway line. The politics around Atlantic Avenue and the trains running in and out of Atlantic Terminal have shaped much of the history of Urban Planning in Brooklyn. Even today, the highly controversial "Brooklyn Atlantic Yards Complex" threatens to destroy some neighborhoods as it helps others develop.

As Atlantic Avenue runs by my neighborhood, it is made up of 6 traffic lanes plus parking on both outside curbs and a 7th turning lane in the center as needed. The Avenue is used as a main corridor for traffic, and use it they do, as a racetrack! It is very hard to cross Atlantic without using a car and because of the turning lane, there is often no place for a pedestrian to stand which is elevated above the cars. The timing of the lights on the cross streets are very short, so as to increase traffic flow, but this also encourages speeding and reckless driving. It is very common to see a memorial to a pedestrian accident victim on any one of the dozens of street corners up and down Atlantic.

With such a wide Roadway, the areas of Fort Greene, Clinton Hill (North Side) and Prospect Heights (South Side) are sharply divided from each other. This division continues east through the middle of Bedford-Stuyvesant, but is as a result of other conditions. With little pulling the neighborhoods together and little place or reason to congregate, there is less incentive



Introduction, continued...

to cross from one side to another. I estimate that most side street traffic is made up of drivers looking for shortcuts to get on Atlantic quicker. This leads me to the economics of Atlantic Avenue. When people drive by so fast and the sidewalks are so narrow, businesses find it hard to attract customers and those that do come don't stick around long enough to create a noticeable influence on the street. Rather, they engage in a "bunker mentality". This is when people linger as little as possible, going directly between car and shop without pause, often putting themselves in danger by "jaywalking."

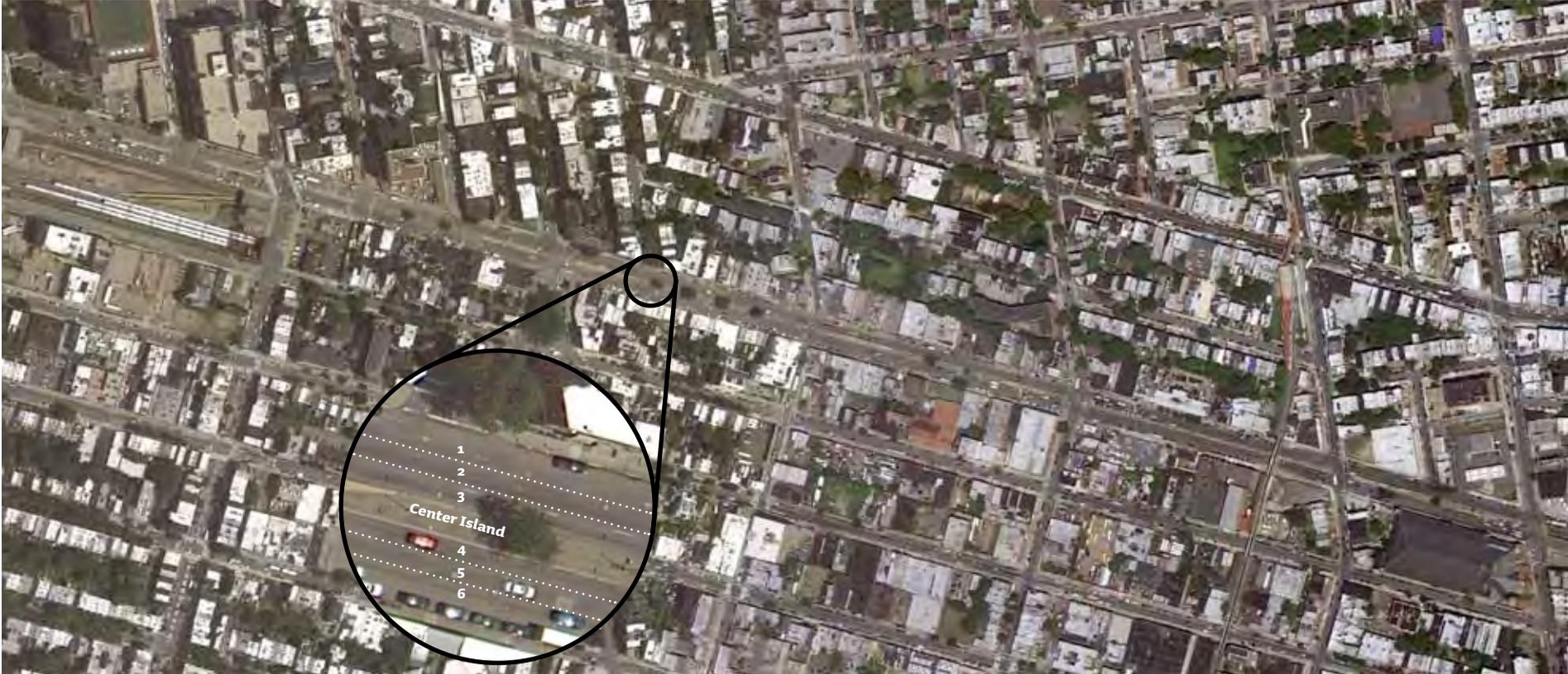
As a consequence, the only businesses that thrive along this portion of Atlantic are automotive related (gas stations, auto repair, car wash, etc.) and warehousing based (shipping and receiving, mini storage, factories, etc.). Because of the gas stations (there are 5 along bordering my neighborhood) and other auto-related businesses, Atlantic is dirty and smelly. Particulate matter in the air is noticeable and soil contamination is common. With people "driving by"

constantly (incidentally, this is a favored route for trucks crossing the borough) we receive more than it's fair share of exhaust fumes.

Aside from the gas stations, most businesses along Atlantic shutter in the evening. With no real neighborhood draw in the daytime and darkness at night, I believe it becomes a spawning ground for criminal activity. The timing couldn't be more important, with a mugging and near-fatal beating occurring on the corner of Atlantic and St. James (roughly 2 blocks from my home) last week. At that corner, there is no way for a car along Atlantic to safely slow down and because this seemingly open corner doesn't open onto a vibrant commercial district, there are no lights or people for that matter, to deter crime from happening. Anyone committing a mugging or burglary just needs to use Atlantic Avenue as a getaway route and can move about relatively unhindered (easily escaping police surveillance). The effects of the criminal activity from Atlantic Avenue can even be felt on Futon Street, the more community-oriented commercial block to our north.



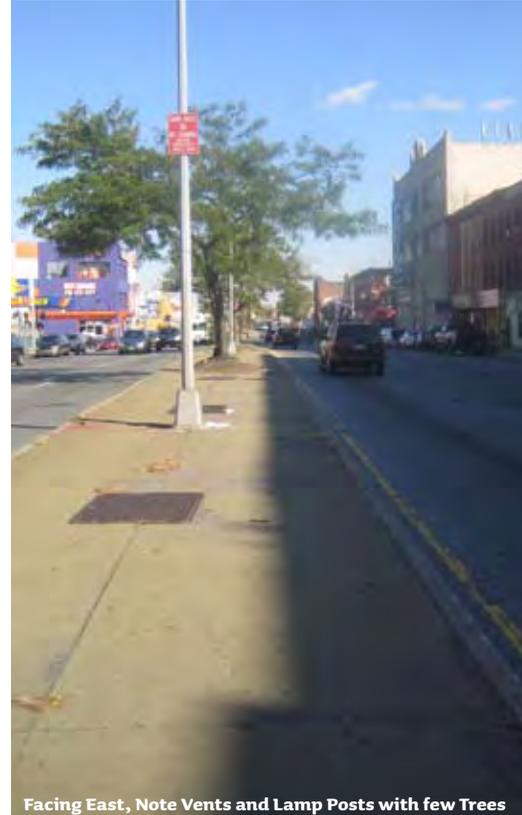
Introduction, A View from Above



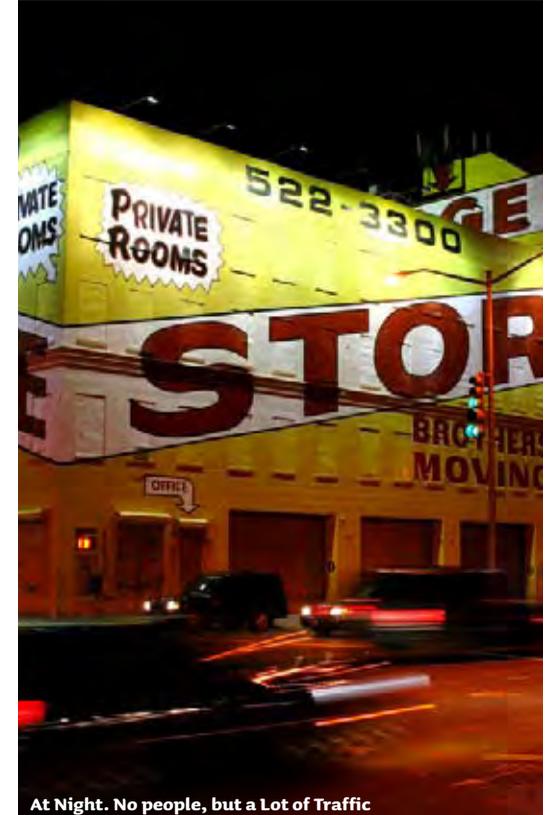
Introduction, A View from the Street



Equipment Cleaning on Street. Chemical Runoff Normal



Facing East, Note Vents and Lamp Posts with few Trees



At Night. No people, but a Lot of Traffic

Structural Changes

Observing how Atlantic is compared to other streets (or compared to itself, west of Flatbush) I note that this 6 lane roadway, needs to be narrowed to a four lane street or even into two separate two-way streets. So, my first intervention is to introduce the principle of Parallel Roads (23) by expanding the center island and the outer sidewalks to absorb one of the 3 lanes on each side. Though I can't separate the two sides as much as the book calls for, I can nonetheless reduce driving speeds and disperse cross town traffic to other streets. By widening (and heightening) the sidewalks, I create the New York version of a Raised Walk (55) allowing pedestrians to feel empowered walking along Atlantic. Safe streets are streets with people on them and landlords of both commercial and residential spaces will take note of this. I could have, but elected not to eliminate parking along this stretch, so there will still be multiple ways for people to land. There will also be less reason for people to drive through and park along adjacent streets.



Interventions and Programming

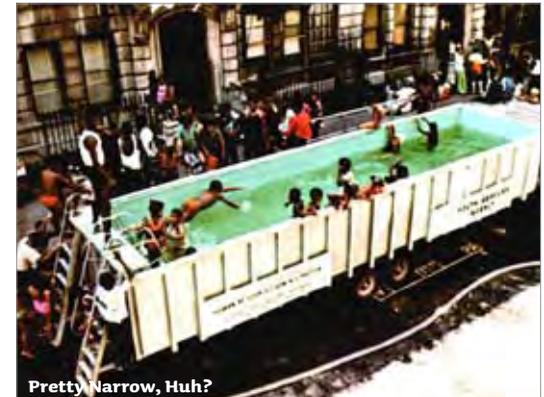
On the center islands, I saw an opportunity for Accessible Green (60). By adding green strips along this stretch, we can establish a form of Common Land (67). It is already normal to see dog runs of long narrow shapes, the same goes for the latest Adventure Playground (73) to open in Manhattan. Depending on the function, each island would require varying degrees of greenery, enclosures and a mix of interventions, like Small Public Squares (61) or community gardens. I personally favor a couple of Bocce Ball and Handball courts. Just about any vegetation will serve to lessen the impact of the particulate matter along Atlantic and with the “Million Trees Project” in full swing throughout the city, planners will welcome the chance to plant more trees along the islands and the widened sidewalks. We can introduce Still Water (71) by installing community pools which are a valuable commodity in my area. Since they cater mostly to small children, they are an excellent draw for families. These islands can create a place where people all around will be drawn to rather than scared of.



The Imagination Playground Recently Opened in Manhattan



Bocce Ball



Pretty Narrow, Huh?

Potential Layouts in Entirety



Reinforcing the

How these Sidewalks and Center Islands will connect with the larger community is another story. Things like raised pedestrian Road Crossings (54) need to attach street corners to the center Islands. I think that with slowed traffic, current pedestrian crossing designs with center knuckles will be more than sufficient to handle future crossings.

The overall issue of through-traffic and congestion can be combatted through the application of Looped Local Roads (49). We can cut off streets without good intersections (like St. James) from Atlantic and allow a Brownstone to be built at the new dead-end. People would be less inclined to fly through the Lefferts Place community, due to the indirect path they would be forced to travel. I think it would also serve to discourage crime, with easy access gone from the area.

Less congestion and more people out on the streets means less pollution and that equals better breathing for my entire family. I think it will also generate into less litter with more appreciation of the neighborhood around us.



St. James and Atlantic. What Happens when it's Cut Off from Thru-Traffic?



Thank you.