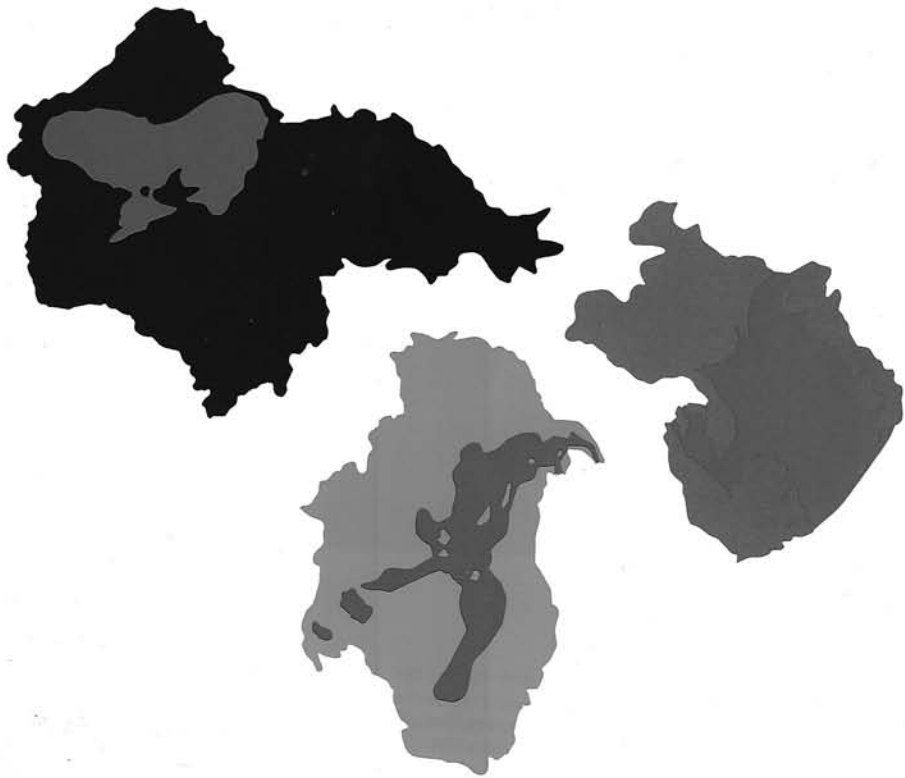


KASSEL 1992

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DOCUMENTA  IX



PARADISE BUILT ART GETS REAL?

We near the end of the Twentieth Century. Getting ready for the next century, we can ask how far Art has come, and where it goes.

Yet looking back on the century, we see remarkably little accomplished. We see a procession of individual artists, like survivors of a long war, hoisting their uneliminated names but nowhere as optimistic or ambitious as the earlier, bolder waves. What, after all, has been realized in daily life, in our built world, from the Futurist waves of the 1910s, or the later Concept thrust of the 60s? What industrial reality has emerged? What new means of production? What direct impact on our material life, as great as that of the drive-shaft, camera and city-plan all evolved from the art of the Renaissance?

We can take a cue from an epic of the Renaissance, *Paradise Lost*. There, in Book VI, appears an era of Pandemonium, resulting from the worship of Mammon, meaning lucre, for a darkening of all the world with smoke and soot from Naptha – a fossil fuel. Is this any different than what takes place in the Gulf? Or Mexico City?

If Art is – to quote Spenser – that by which Nature makes more Nature, and if – as everyone knows – Nature is in danger of collapse, then we might suppose that Art has not been bold enough or strong enough to do its job. We are not in tandem with the Variety Theater of species. Even if we try saving vital marshes, for example, there remain – unlike before – the problems of heavy metals, compounds like PCBs, and the wipeout of habitats further down a migratory flyway. The crisis becomes overwhelming, and art – the human endeavor to join up with Nature (the term "ecological art" is redundant) – does not effectively respond.

There have been times in which a wide range of higher species, like the dinosaurs, have disappeared, but the vitality of Nature remained, generating new forms. And times in which a large part of humanity has disappeared, as in the Plague, but the forests and soil, though weakened by farming, could recover. And times in which the accumulations of salts and silt which cultures built great cities and canals, only to collapse, but while a desert spread at least the waters went underground. But our Twentieth Century has been different. It has begotten a much greater danger, a functionally eternal damnation, resulting from what appears as a worship of, with dependence on, combustible rocks. A world economy is founded on the discovery, extraction and chemical or nuclear destruction of energy-rich minerals underground, releasing vast quantities of excess residues into the air, ground and water – with murderous consequences for all of life, including the simplest cycles of life. There seems to have been a presumption that the living environment was not sufficient for wealth. There has, further, been a foregoing of sovereignty over wealth to those few people driven to gain remote access to secret reserves and dangerous technologies, beyond reach, and above everyone else. The struggle is mortal.

I learned of it after ten years of trying, at the instigation of a cadre of artists in New York organizing as "Space Force", to first see with satellites and then publish the true pictures of what is going on in... the Gulf, Libya, Lebanon,

the Chernobyl disaster site, the Falklands, the North Sea and Adriatic with their algae blooms... phenomena of importance to our future.

I learned that the truth about these locations, and about the attendant ecological difficulties, is systematically turned upside down, so that no one in the public, nor even your experts at universities and think tanks, can have reliable information on which to base a decision. Anything like a truthful landscape painting or history painting, not much different in purpose from the landscape of Constable or news "photos" of David, when made of an important site or situation, cannot be published, and only with difficulty can be produced. I learned, in effect, that long-established tasks of art, like that of portraying the powers of nature and humanity as they are, in the open field, in the hunt and battle, are no longer allowed. I learned that the West, including its poor Third World adjuncts, was not much different from the East: in either case, efforts are made to keep the public unaware.

Yet in both cases, here and there, art ideas were surging forth. If someone from the West wished to follow through on recent imaginations, on projects proposed by artists of recent decades, like Smithson, Nauman, Oppenheim and Beuys, they would have gotten further along, at least in construction, outside their own societies, in the East. If someone wished to promulgate the architectural concepts of territory derived from such art, as indicated by art historian Vincent Scully, one might find like thinking better in an alleged enemy state than in one's own land. The same type of State forces which crushed the Constructivists in the East have also been active in the West, and have on both sides been subduing Art for the same reason: to assure structures of Wealth based on life-destructive rocks to which only the most secretive and grasping humans can have access. Little wonder that Joseph Beuys, setting forth with Coyote, Fat Corner and Marsch Aktionen the paradigms for Direkte Demokratie, was bogged down. Art, like biological Nature, has been systematically denied.

The chief culprit – I name one, if only for purposes of Recital, if only to show the scope of the problem – could be identified as Winston Churchill.

We go back to early in the century, when – for example – there were serious questions of which fuel base to develop, which urban fantasy to pursue, which industrial systems to adopt. At that time of decision, what prevailed instead is that a certain landscape painter, comfortable with old appearances of wealth, developed – as he often wrote – an obsession with the accumulated residues trapped in "Eden".

This obsession begot from 1911 to 1914, from a time of hoped-for European consortia to the First World War, a methodical but rapid series of moves transforming what would have been a modest stake in oil fields in the Gulf into a near monopoly of world oil and gas. Most other investors were betrayed. The Empire alone was to possess and mine Eden. Hence, at Churchill's unauthorized initiative, the pre-war mobilization of the British fleet. Hence, again at his initiative, the disaster at Gallipoli, which was meant to be lost in order to distract the enemy away from the Gulf. Hence the expropriation or nationalization of assets in what came to be known as the Iraq Petroleum Company. Hence a Red Line Agreement, quite arbitrary, which in the 1980s left a border quite red with Iraqi and Iranian blood. Hence the "Hankey Plan", known now only through expiration of the censors' seal, to

withdraw from Europe in 1919 and abandon the US, French, Italians, Serbs and so on, letting them fight in vain, without access to the Main Prize. And hence, because the War ended before the plan would start, on 1 January 1919, there has since been the formation of a slightly-wider oligopoly which in 1946 controlled 95% of non-Soviet oil and gas – with the long-term consequence, given the stifling dominance, of a blockage of any serious shift to a safer industrial system, and of a consignment to those not in control of the mineral-combustion industry to the status "Third World".

Also during the same years 1911–14, there was Constructivism, Futurism, seeds of video in Fotodinamisme, Vorticism and the breaking away from horizons with Suprematism. There was a start of what could have then become – through Leonidov, Sant'Elia, El Lissitzky, even their corollary industrial fantasists in America, England and France – a whole new architecture of cities and a return to wilderness on the land, with power derived direct (Marinetti said) from the sea. While these energies diminished in the War, they flared up wild in Russia after 1917. Something was emerging in Europe. And this something new, away from the classical towards the visceral, this fantasy of Open Construction and Fluid Dynamics, was met in 1914 by a massive Countermove, a massive turning away from Public Access, a massive rupture of East from West, with the consequent legacy of the Iron Curtain (due more to Churchill, seeking blockage of land access to the Gulf, than to Russia), with the consequent shattering of material evolution or a focus on meeting the true environmental energy needs of human beings in cities. Our skies, forests and shores show the result. The architecture envisioned by Alberti – of clean air, clear water and a good view, with open circulation – like the architecture set down as possible fantasy early this century – does not now exist. And meantime, the gap between the First and Third Worlds, experts say, widens.

Is it encouraging that Montenegro, to some an enemy state, has declared (with any weight?) that it is now an "ecological republic"? What might then be done there, amidst struggle?

Let it suffice, without publishing plans, that artists, if coordinated in legal ventures, can achieve – like any other profession – effective power. Art can get real.

To show that it must, I cite an irony occurring on 25 May 1990, the day that prizes were handed out at the last Venice Biennale. The person selected to win the Lion d'Or, as the best that Art could offer to the world, had been involved ten years earlier in a group of artists called The Offices. This group of six, which includes by now three in documenta, had been asked by scientists in California, for example, to help promote new, ocean-based forms of non-polluting energy, in part to avert a possible Greenhouse Effect. But The Offices fell apart, the task request was not met, no media campaign was prepared, and ten years later, on the day meant to encode what was the status and direction of art, a lead newspaper headline said "UN Warning on Warming: Cut Emissions 60% Now, or Else." Would the headline and ensuing story, and the scope or impact of the Biennale, have been different if The Offices – offering practical consultations – had stayed together.

David Rockefeller, a legate of Big Oil, once explained to Les Levine that funding mechanisms for artists, such as the NEA he helped set up, were meant to (1) prevent any banding together, and (2) screen out ideas with real-world impact. There is an adversarial situation. How does one surmount it?

In groping for a follow-through from art probe to built structures, we have these developments of recent decades: (1) Walter De Maria said to me in 1978 that he would like to build many lightning fields, as part of ecosystem engineering, given a belief among scientists of their functional value. (2) Further to what De Maria had published, a NY lawyer set up a construction company for him and Michael Heizer, presumably for large projects. It has yet to be exercised. (3) A major patron invited Dennis Oppenheim to build marshworks in the Camargue. The dealer blocked the deal, but his action led to a corporation now holding rights of copyright access to the earthworks as situated within saltwater-drainage districts, like the Rhone and West Mediterranean basins, for large-context planning and public finance. (4) Both Joseph Beuys and Robert Smithson initiated the practice of on-site action, in marshes: a growing number of younger artists develop this practice. (5) A regional government has granted to an art corporation rights to help establish architectural projects, including energy and tax-base survey services, for a bay of about 15 km by 20 km; much of the last year of work by Gordon Matta-Clark, meant to follow upon Leonidov, would be used. Here's a scenario.

I. Starting with the question of fuel, of calories, of fire, we consult the Chief of the Hunters. We consult Joseph Beuys.

Essential. Everything must go through Fat Corner. It must all go through a paraffin phase. A phase of low-molecular weight hydrocarbons. At a point convertible into carbohydrates. A phase, at lowest molecular weight, in leanest form, of Methane.

Consequence One. Aside from whatever energy might come direct from the sun, or from wind, waves and thermal gradients as effects of the sun, or from tides as effects of the moon, or from waterfalls as effects of earth's irregular surface, or from hydrogen howsoever obtained, the hydrocarbons to be used as fuel or industrial rawstuff shall be low-molecular weight hydrocarbons – e.g. methane and ethane – derived from biological fermentation. The sequence is (carbon dioxide) – (oxygen) degraded to (methane).

Consequence Two. Or the sequence is back again from methane, as rawstuff, upgradable in reactions to (carbon dioxide) – (oxygen). Urban-industrial wastes can be reduced by pyrolysis to about 90% methane or related gases, with 10% ash, mostly extractable. Instead of burning the gases, as some propose, use them as a substrate for production of monocellular organisms, such as yeasts or keratin proteins. Further upgrading of the proteins can yield a keratinaceous tissue, like feathers or scales, that can be dropped by aircraft over marshes and other feeding grounds. Wild animals uptake directly from the city offstream, clean.

II. For the main source of biological material for degradation, we consult Robert Smithson, Dennis Oppenheim and other earth artists, with their concept of the concavity and of saltworks.

Essential. The bulk of materials collect in catchments. They flow downhill, with gravity, despite the occasional upward vectors of evaporation, wind and wave transport.

Consequence One. The repository of life-supporting wealth is the saltwater basin. Sustainable and near inexhaustible harvesting of vegetation to ferment, for example, into hydrocarbons, or to react for production of hydrogen, or to distill for fine chemicals and foodstuff, is most reliably in the salt sea.

Consequence Two. For any site on earth, upland or underwater, there is a given body or stream of saltwater, which collects all nutrients, soils, wastes, pollutants. The planet can be mapped and

divided according to respective saltwater basins, with respective accumulations of soil, water and pollutants. Each mapped catchment is a physical commonwealth.

III. For relations with the other higher species, consult not the taxonomists, who single out individual species amidst space as a void, but the systems ecologists, who measure the overall cash-flow web of nutrients, meshing species amidst a larger energy-flow metabolism.

Futurist Body Madness supersedes the outward forms. Species can come and go; what of the overall chemical rates for sites, readable by sensors?

Essential. Defined by Beuys in the Coyote piece: we are copredators, with the coyotes, also tigers, and the environment is just information to be processed. We must be Hunters, with artists as Chiefs.

Consequence. Instead of farming animals, or keeping them in zoos, let terrain return to the wild and conduct armed campaigns – using latest military (terrain holding) engineering – to take part in, not try to dominate the evolutionary process. As most land is used to feed domestic animals, either directly or indirectly, this can revert. Most domestic croplands can revert, as well. A return to a pre-neolithic land economy is both scientifically and, with Beuys, culturally justified.

Consequence. As wild animals gravitate to marshes, as nutrients are dispersed by insects, birds and fish that enter and exit marshes, make the marsh the *sine qua non* of natural wealth. Not the farm, but the swamp, shall be the focus of economic attention. Model: Beuys' Marsch Aktion, slated for a site near Hamburg; Oppenheim marsh and bird migration projects, as in the San Jun Delta. Here go the land incisions, feather keratins from the city, and primary feeding grounds. Here, rather, we make a fertile City of the Dead, a "Paradise" in the original meaning.

IV. For an angle on it all, we subject sites to scrutiny, not pictorially but with sensors, chiefly from above. We adopt Aerial Suprematism. We consult Sol Lewitt, the concrete artists, the field-theory painters, all those developing ways of looking upon a field – not just static, but in motion, in comparison, to be read as color-language stream.

Essential. End of the animal farm, or flock with pastor. The end is always the same: species selection and systematic extermination. The concept of master and state, of inaccessible and secret authority, must yield to the universal appetite for knowledge and explanation, with direct evidence.

Consequence. As declared by the artists' successor to current military forms, Space Force. And not just, as astronaut Ulf Merbold would say, to better see the problems of the planet; rather, to set up means of monitoring to better hunting, fishing, gathering, for a better return to pre-neolithic, pre-monocultural, efficient cycling systems. As this is possible through civil sensors, with distribution of imagery through civil channels, we achieve a direct biofeedback mechanism, or means – through public eyes – to Beuys "Direkte Demokratie."

Consequence, specifically: Development of real-time digital-data processing drawing on multiple scanning sensors, for comparative monitor display, using the sensibility of visual researchers like Paul Sharits (N:O:T:H:I:N:G), Keith Sonnier (Animation II), Sol Lewitt (Arcs, Circles & Grids, and other computer-programmable drawings), Nam June Paik. The evolution of whatever might be HDTV ensues, referenced to hard facts about dynamic conditions.

V. Moving to the question of the room, the space

we call our own, we start with the body and its immediate surrounding, clothes.

Essential. Defined by Schneemann with her bridging and straddle pieces, by Horn with her exoskeleton performances, by Abramovic with her co-existential tension works: the body as the first reference for architecture. Breathing is the primary act; space must then be seen as elastic, as substantial, as gas. We consult Wendy Jacob. And we ask what is the erotic arousal from the *contre-roule* of breathing, the pumping of the diaphragm. Consequence. An erotic rather than imposed and academic approach to architecture. Development of spaces in which to breathe and move, starting from the premise of intimate space outward. End of "planning" and "drafting board" construction, working more with site simulators to find what a body wants in the space.

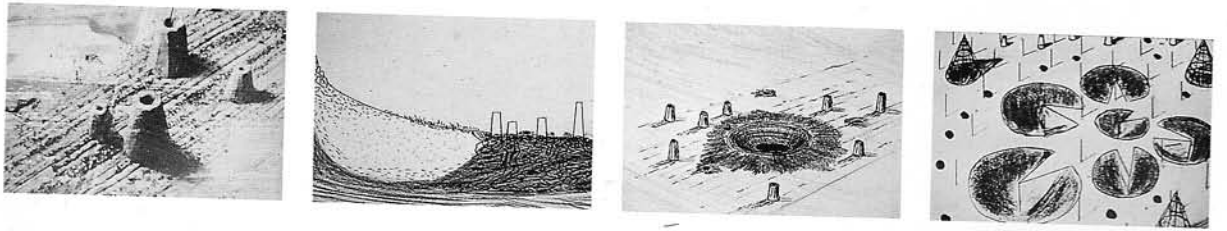
VI. Ending with the question of the City, the subject defined by Alberti for architecture, we posit the metabolic functions of the body, and the need to assure such throughout the site. We consult Merete Mattern, Yona Friedman and other open plan designers, who first of all seek minimum interference with the terrain as living substrate. From what has been called conceptual art, e.g. Serra, Lewitt, Nauman, Oppenheim, Matta-Clark, one can build structures allowing most land to be open to wild species and to proper water flow.

Consequence. The presence of city as "concrete jungle", with its elimination of multispecies habitat, can be replaced with the construction of cities above ground or niched into hills, above the bulk of grazing and predatory animals, certainly not interfering in waterways. Sprawl results from persisting with Renaissance concepts of garden and fortress. Replace it.

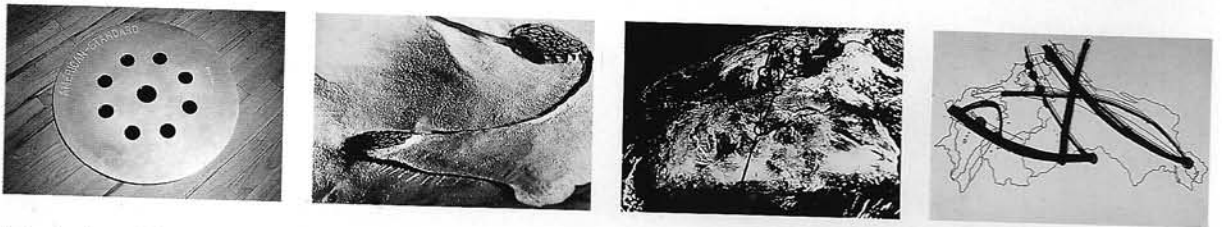
Either you build cities and countrysides as if old fashions, like old agricultural habits, must continue, with the well-known deadly consequence, or you take literally what the artists of the century have been bodying forth. If we don't do the latter, with fullscale industrial effect, we will not heed our own social instincts, our own imaginations, and the 1992 documents will be so much playing of a band on the Titanic.

Peter Fend

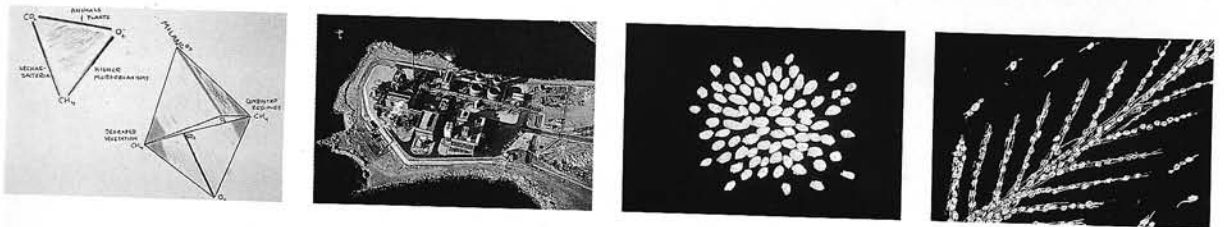
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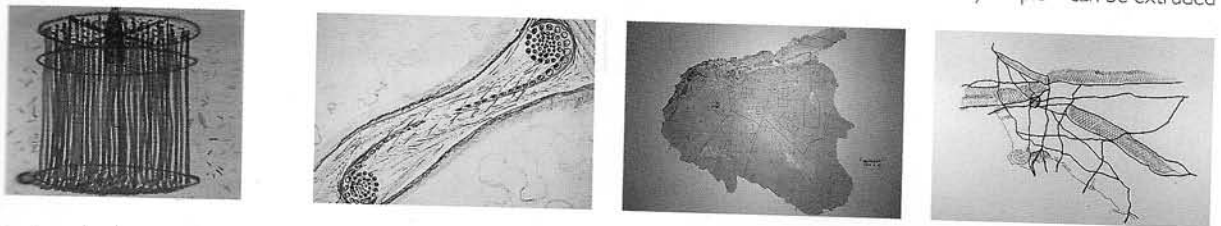
Analysis of Oppenheim's Dry Wells shows their utility in upwelling underground aquifers near salt pans, to increase freshwater-saltwater mix and allow for gradual expansion, in spiral, of animal feeding grounds, fecund centers of nutrient exchange.



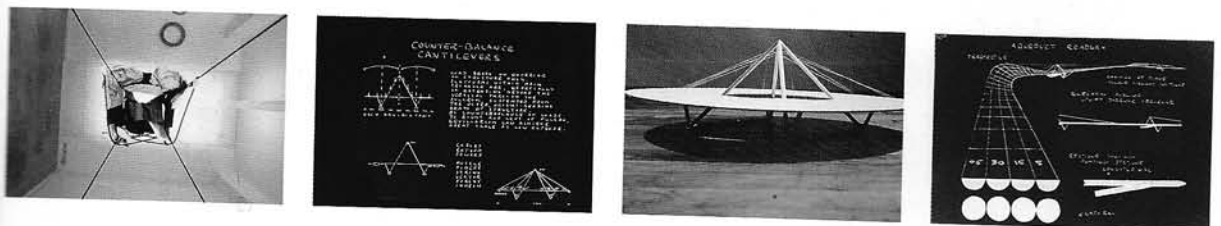
Actualization of Kirsten Mosher's American Standard, which establishes value (a "standard") in drainage, leads to ever-larger versions of salt-water sinks, be that a surrogation of the dam in a double convex disc river control system, stringing marshes downstream, or a line-up of oases along prime nutrient transport path (migration routes) within a drainage basin – here, the Mediterranean.



Josef Beuys' Fat Corner concept, combined with feather projects by Rebecca Horn and Oppenheim, engender a total cycling system within a salt sink. Rather than be dumped or separately re-cycled, wastes are pyrolyzed to yield mostly gas, some ash, with the gas being used not as low-grade fuel but as a substrate in a factory for production of a uniform strain of microorganisms. The strain is upgraded by membrane mediation of information into keratinaceous tissue, which – being the material of hair and skin, very simple – can be extruded



to form feathers, suitable for deposition in marshlands and feeding grounds, assuring stable upland conditions. Downstream, nutrient outflows are re-gathered in bottom-harvest large algae rigs, affording a fresh supply of rawstuff, from the entire catchment of soil-water flows, suitable to cyclably sustain a physically autonomous soil unit, like the Dead Sea Basin. Cities go upland, or on pilotis, to allow terrain processes, particularly the marshlands near cities, to metabolize.



Heather Jansen's body suits, like the corporate Body Ware projects that follow, yield a aesthetic working-out of ideas recently manifest, for example, by Walter De Maria. Structures can easily go on pilotis or into hills, as in LA above, and can afford a mimicry of bodily function in all parts, including a pumped-aqueduct transit system. Futurist Body Madness engulfs the city.