

# ARCADE

ARCHITECTURE / DESIGN IN THE NORTHWEST

VOLUME 27.04 / SUMMER 2009

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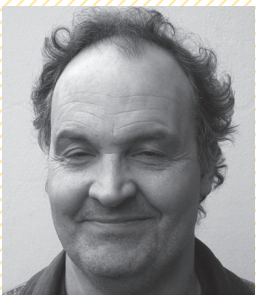
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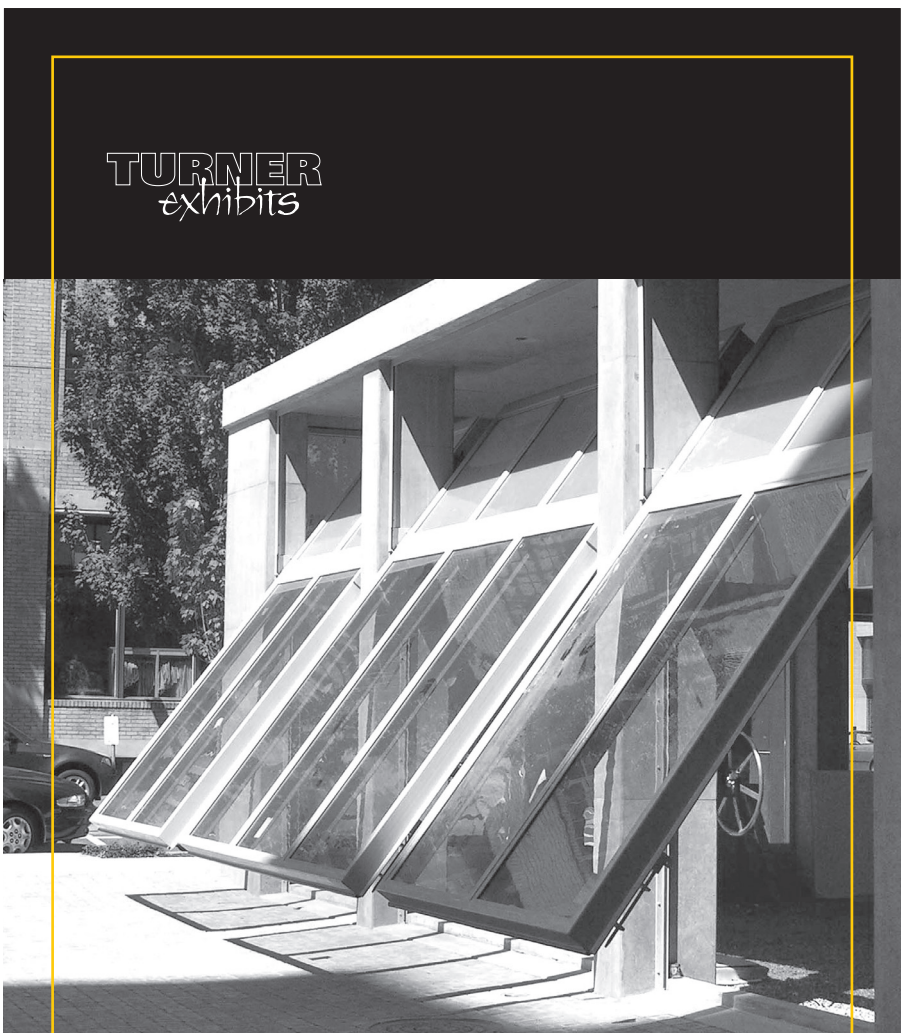


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River of Resources (aka The Garbage Museum)  
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## HUTCHINSON AND MAUL: AN EMERGING VOICE

On March 19, 2009 Seattle-based architecture firm Hutchinson and Maul traveled to New York to share their practice as participants in the Architectural League of New York's Emerging Voices lecture series. Started in 1982, the series recognizes and encourages architects who are gaining prominence in their profession, providing a venue where they can share their projects and philosophies with the design community.

Hutchinson and Maul designs with a sense of pragmatism, drawing resolution from complexity by conceptualizing volume, form and interior and exterior space as one complete entity; through a strongly limited exterior and interior palate, design elements play multiple roles simultaneously. An example: In the Metal Shop and Cantilever Office Addition, a series of steel-clad volumes acts as skylight, vehicle barrier, code-mandated parking screening and stair tube, providing both aesthetic interest and function through a single element.

In addition to this pragmatic approach, the firm also engages in conceptual and installation work, highlighting the value and resonance in existing spaces. For instance, in their Hole House # 1 and #2 projects, they created a simple yet unexpected exploration of light by drilling holes in the façade of an old farmhouse slated for demolition.

For more information on The Emerging Voices Lecture series, visit [www.archleague.org](http://www.archleague.org). To explore the work of Hutchinson and Maul, visit [www.hutchinsonandmaul.com](http://www.hutchinsonandmaul.com).

ERIN KENDIG



PHOTOS: COURTESY OF HUTCHINSON AND MAUL ARCHITECTURE

## OPEN TO QUESTION

Six oversized steel doors opened to the public on April 3 outside of the University of Washington Tower. By passing through those doors, the visitor is guided through a graphic history of political and social activism. Over 200 people attended the launch event of *Open to Question*, a student-designed temporary exhibition on political and social activism in Seattle's University District. The launch marked the opening of the exhibition and also featured a public lecture by noted Seattle historian Paul Dorpat.

The exhibition takes the form of six freestanding steel doors, each eight feet tall. The idea of open doors was inspired by the exhibition title. Each door tackles a major theme in University District activism of the 1960s and 70s: tension, equality, voices and peace. The final door presents a question – “What Doors Will You Open?” – and is fabricated from chalkboard to encourage visitor responses. (The doorknob is sliced in half horizontally to form a handy chalk repository).

Julia Swan, a former UW grad student, developed the exhibit's content using information gathered for her Museology Program thesis. The project was then given to students in UW's Environmental Design course. From a wide range of ideas, a team of four students was selected to turn the project into a reality: two undergraduates, Mia Pizzuto and Carina Skrobecki, and two graduates, Leslie MacNeil and Erin Williams.

The students were presented with a content outline and an image archive of gritty photos and newspaper clippings. The challenge: come up with a concept for a physical structure to house the exhibition, as well as a graphic treatment that would work well with low quality, black-and-white images. As it was slated for the outdoor plaza of UW Tower, the exhibition was required to be entirely freestanding and weatherproof. No attachments to the building, columns or even the floor were permitted.

*Open to Question* launched April 3 and will run through the summer. Please check [www.opentoquestion.org](http://www.opentoquestion.org) for events and additional information. Free and open to the public.

For more information on the UW School of Art visit: <http://art.washington.edu>.

KRISTINE MATTHEWS



PHOTO: FRANCIS LUU



## DANISH ALCHEMY

Sometimes when you merge traditionally separated elements, the result is greater than the sum of its parts. The hybrid becomes a synthesis. The Danish architecture firm BIG – distancing itself from the modernist tradition of the separation of functions – has made synthesizing one of its trademarks. Here's a clip from front man Bjarke Ingels' *BIGamy manifesto*: "What if design could be the opposite of conflict? Not by ignoring it but by feeding off it. A way to incorporate and integrate differences—not through compromise or by choosing sides but by tying conflicting interests into a Gordian knot of new ideas...."

An example of this approach is their project The Mountain, completed in 2008. The master plan called for a separate parking garage and a housing block to be built on the same lot. Instead BIG merged the two so that 11 levels of parking became the foundation for the apartments, each with their own private garden enjoying sunlight, fresh air and a generous view. The 10-story building synthesizes suburban living with urban density.

Another recent example is the proposal BIG made for a competition regarding the redesign of Slussen in Stockholm, Sweden. Currently Slussen is a worn out system of roads with no room for pedestrians or cyclists. It is a busy intersection of cars, busses, trains and subway as well as ferries. The plan for a new traffic structure was developed before the competition, with soft traffic (pedestrians and bikes) on top of the heavy traffic (cars and trains). But instead of separating the different levels, connected only by stairs and elevators in a traditional way, BIG proposed to integrate all publicly accessible areas around Slussen by interweaving the levels using descending and ascending ramps that visually open up the complex and allow people to move through it freely.

This unifying armature that merges the different programs in a layered manner has similarities with The Mountain. Slussen's heavy traffic is immersed under a rising hillside, freeing large areas – attractively located at the waterfront – for urban leisure activities. BIG's solution is conceptual. The large scale is fearless, which provides a beautiful clarity, but also – on a human scale – challenges the intimacy. However, one can see the series of narrow openings that are slit into the surface as an attempt to deal with this and soften up the overall expression. Beneath the flaps of the slits are spaces for retail, while the spaces above become public hangout places with water views. A recreational traffic hub is created.

ELISABETH GINSBERG

BIG (BJARKE INGELS GROUP) IS A COPENHAGEN-BASED ARCHITECTURE FIRM FOUNDED BY ARCHITECT BJARKE INGELS IN 2006. WWW.BIG.DK



## WHO'S DRIVING?

Change. It's hard to deny that this timeless yet completely nebulous term is the conspicuous word of the moment on multiple levels. With that said, what factors, both nationally and globally, instigate "change"?

International engineering firm ARUP has taken a shot at naming the key shapers of change in their *Drivers of Change* publications. First created in 2006 with their updated "rainbow set" of cards to be released in spring 2009, *Drivers of Change* explores what ARUP identifies as the six issues most likely to have major impact on society and, specifically, the work of ARUP (i.e. the built environment). In these cards, the firm pinpoints energy, climate change, water, waste, urbanization and demographics as urgent factors and offers a plethora of illuminating facts concerning these issues. For example, "It is estimated that stabilizing greenhouse gas emissions at between 450-550 parts per million CO<sub>2</sub> will be required to avoid dangerous climate change. Ultimately stabilization – at whatever level – requires annual emissions be brought down to more than 80% below current levels" (*Rainbow Set: Climate Change*). Or, "18% of all urban housing units are nonpermanent structures. One-third of the world's urban population lives in what are defined by the UN as slum conditions" (*Rainbow Set: Urbanization*).

For more fun facts, which hopefully will provide fodder for new solutions (or at least mitigation?) concerning current environmental and societal challenges, visit [www.driversofchange.com](http://www.driversofchange.com).

ERIN KENDIG



IMAGE: BIG





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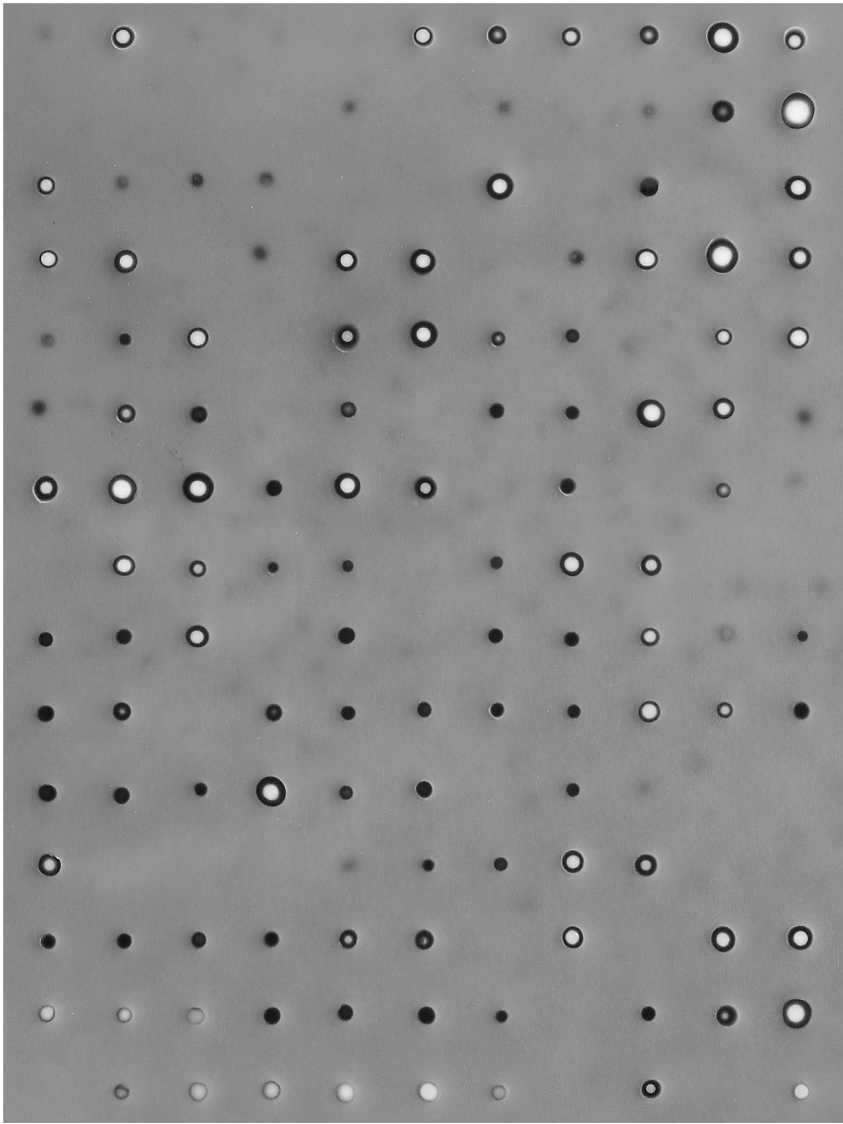
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# PAINTBRUSH

**IN THE AFTERMATH OF WORLD WAR II** and amid the youth uprisings of the 1960s, artists around the world rebelled against the conventions and traditions of painting, and started to attack the canvas. Come see artwork by well-known figures like **Jasper Johns, Roy Lichtenstein** and **Andy Warhol**, along with lesser-known peers who made equally challenging work.

This exhibition is organized by the Seattle Art Museum. Generous support has been provided by Jon & Mary Shirley. A lead grant was awarded by the Paul G. Allen Family Foundation. Exhibition sponsors are the Seattle Mayor's Office of Arts and Cultural Affairs, the Seattle Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Arts. Additional support is provided by contributors to the Annual Fund.

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paula rees

Lately, our heads have been filled with the word “change.” Although politicians use it to assert their agendas, designers understand that great opportunity is embedded in this word; it’s the opportunity to make a difference. Designers also understand that making a meaningful difference requires commitment and practice. Hopefully, politicians and those holding the financial purse strings will join in creating change in our country and design innovation will be engaged at the beginning of new initiatives instead of at the end. The truth is, change is difficult, and positive change in our built environment can only happen if the process is lead by design.

In the 1960s, the US was a world leader in the design of new materials, food processes, living environments and transportation on the ground and into space. In the last 50 years, design faded while technology and science overwhelmed the playing field. We have now returned full circle, and it is time to add design back into the mix, re-establishing its role in processes that encourage exploration and allow for failure. As the world becomes less mechanical and linear, we need to work collaboratively and quickly to create solutions for tomorrow’s challenges—solutions that are more flexible, organic and adaptive.

## PERFECTLY POISED TO GO BACK TO THE FUTURE

You may have heard President Obama talking about Jane Jacobs and her 1961 musings in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. Today, her four key messages about what makes great urban places are more urgently needed than ever. They need: 1) a variety of building types both old and new, shorter and taller; 2) a real mix of uses providing 24/7 activity and allowance for messiness; 3) shorter streets designed for the pedestrian experience and 4) to embrace density because that’s what the urban experience is about. What we need now is a place where we can put those ideas into play.

## ENTER INTERBAY

Interbay is an emerging urban district just a few minutes from Downtown Seattle that has been on this path for over 10 years. Through an inclusive, grass roots design and planning process, property owners, tenants and adjoining neighborhoods have purposefully come together in a bottom-up effort to address the kind of change that Jacobs described and that our leaders are finally recognizing a half-century later. As we are all being called upon to create new jobs, support economic stimulus and rebuild our communities from the ground up, Interbay is the perfect place to experiment. It challenges outdated and arbitrary zoning boundaries that prohibit real change for our future.

Interbay’s inner-city location remained fallow and neglected for over four decades while being surrounded by prosperous and successful residential neighborhoods. Fortunately, its regional resources and public green-space include a golf course, a great community garden, ball fields, a collegiate soccer stadium and a new cruise-ship terminal. But one of its greatest assets is its visibility. Interbay is edged by one of the city’s busiest arterials, and with new transit connections on the way, it becomes the perfect incubator for creating change on many levels.

## CHANGE WE CAN CELEBRATE

Designing change can be a challenge in a city as young as Seattle, where much of what was built was as transient as the gold rush. But there’s always something worth keeping, especially in Interbay, where the old provides fantastic opportunities for reuse, creating a simple backdrop for the newer mix. The existing rules have insisted that we silo people into buildings with strictly separate uses like retail, office, industrial and residential. But this approach minimizes our ability to experience a full and abundant life. As part of Interbay’s collaborative neighborhood association, the Freehold Group is planning for a thousand or more workforce housing units in the Interbay area where today there is only one resident. We can just as easily imagine an abandoned, industrial wood truss building as a new recreation center, a bowling alley or creative office space. Plans for a new mixed-use building has an “edible rooftop” for the restaurants below. We are changing a previous “stop and go” retailer into a desirable “stop



FOR INTERBAY WE’VE BEEN MOST INSPIRED BY CHINA’S REUSE AND RENOVATION OF THEIR INDUSTRIAL BUILDINGS AND LANDS FOR CREATIVE NEW PURPOSES: OFFICES, RETAIL, ART, MANUFACTURING AND RESTAURANTS. PHOTOS BY PAULA REES.

and stay.” Clearly, the street is our Internet, our real connection to others. If we start spending less time regulating what goes inside buildings and more time designing livable streets – where the life of urban communities actually takes place – we’ll be designing places that will endure centuries.

Change will happen, no matter what. So our choice is simple: Are we going to design our future or be subject to it?

PAULA REES OF MAESTRI IS LEAD ON PLACEMAKING FOR THE FREEHOLD GROUP, DEVELOPERS AND INITIATORS OF THE INTERBAY NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION AND COLLABORATIVE MASTER PLANNING EFFORTS. FREEHOLD AND THEIR MANY TALENTED DESIGN FIRM PARTNERS ARE CLEAR ABOUT THE RESPONSIBILITY AND NEED OF LEADERSHIP IN TAKING ON THE LARGER SOCIAL DESIGN OPPORTUNITIES OF OUR COMMUNITIES. [WWW.OUR-INTERBAY.ORG](http://WWW.OUR-INTERBAY.ORG)



# PORTLAND'S DEPARTURE

public spaces shine while architecture schools meet

trevor boddy

## ARCHITECTURAL COCKTAILS

It had been over two decades since I spent a year teaching architecture at the University of Oregon but had hardly visited since. In Portland for a recent gathering of North America's architecture schools, this Vancouverite was keen to mark the city's urban transformation, but it was an architectural cocktail that surprised me most.

No, I am not referring to that smooth martini menu of architectural styles lining Portland's Park Blocks, nor the admixture of green and earnest intentions always dear to Willamette Valley designers, but an actual, drinkable infusion of alcohol named after Portland's most prominent architect.

I was surprised by the wit and historical knowledge demonstrated by the cocktail-menu devisers at the new rooftop lounge called Departure because they describe the "A.E. Doyle" as a "modern re-interpretation of the classic Manhattan," with the bourbon replaced by the Japanese high-test sake distillate known as *shochu*. This telling detail may summarize the intentions of a city that is attempting to build residential density (largely in the much a-building Pearl District) and urbanity block by block—a kind of low-key, West Coast Manhattanism.

The "A.E. Doyle" cocktail, and the ultra-hip lounge where it was served, became a byword for me for the city's changes since the mid-1980s, when I had used Portland's buildings as a resource to teach history and theory, devising student design studio problems for its un-hurried streets. I doubt if there was a single bottle of shochu in Portland the last time I was there; now there are a dozen varieties on offer in the Departure lounge built on top of A.E. Doyle's 1909 former Meier and Frank Department Store. (A.E. Doyle was a grand and talented designer inspired by the Beaux-arts who graced Portland with some of its finest churches and public buildings in the early 20th century. He was a high Tory—nothing like Portland's other most famous architect, the radical innovator Pietro Belluschi, whose nearby 1948 Reliance Building was one of the country's first and best curtain wall office towers.) The lounge is part of the new boutique hotel, The Nines, that occupies the top nine of the building's terra-cotta-clad floors; a new Macy's is snuggled into the lower five levels. SERA architects have done a fine job restoring Doyle's terra-cotta façade, hollowing out a mid-block atrium up top for the hotel.

**Memo to developers everywhere: Public realm investment yields land lift. Memo to city halls everywhere: A trip to Portland should be a requirement for any person about to enter elected public life.**

Designed by Jeff Kovel of Skylab Architects, Departure is all-new construction perched on the building's roof. Because it is supported on the preserved building, the rooftop addition had to employ light materials, sometimes film-set light and retro-futurist in look. Angled walls and sci-fi lighting line the path from elevator to hostess station, and the 250 seat restaurant-lounge is surprisingly rich visually and socially. The range of interior and exterior rooms are lit and framed in a way that makes bar patrons look like extras on a *Star Trek* set: "Jim Beam me up, Scotty!"

Kovel and Skylab Architects are best known for Doug Fir, a timber-lodge-aesthetic rock club and restaurant inserted into a 1960s-vintage, eastside Portland motel. Departure has much of the same impact as Doug Fir—an initial bite of surreality, a heady high of postmodern irony, but then a long-term mellowing into respect for its space-making and a richness of detail. In other words, Departure's architecture has an impact not unlike that of its signature cocktail.

## MEAT + POTATOES URBANISM

The Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture (ACSA) brings together all of the continent's architecture schools for a rich program of academic papers, keynote talks/panels and tours of the host city. After Skylab's architectural cocktail, it was viewing and experiencing Portland's urban initiatives that was the nourishing main course at ACSA's annual architectural banquet.

It says something about Portland's compact urbanity that none of the tours required buses—just a walk or a streetcar ride. The host architecture schools, the University of Oregon and Portland State University, wanted its professorial visitors to see neighborhoods, not monuments, so there was no side trip to see Alvar Aalto's best American project, the Mount Angel Library, 40 minutes south. One tour was devoted to the south downtown waterfront, another to the Pearl District and a third to the string of new urban spaces beaded by landscape architect Lawrence Halprin through a multi-block zone of late 1960s urban renewal reconstruction.

Seeing the Halprin parks was the key to my understanding of the success of these two other zones, constructed a quarter-century later. Most of us doing the walk were amazed that a small city had made such a significant investment in

public space and were delighted to hear that a citizens group has formed to protect this legacy.

In this way, what was most impressive about the Pearl District was less its new condo towers and apartment blocks (generally better detailed and more interesting architecturally than Vancouver's hulking high rises) and more the range of parks, plazas and piazzeta that enliven what was – the last time I visited Portland – a non-descript semi-industrial zone behind Powell's City of Books. As is the case in downtown Vancouver, authorities are scrambling to provide the Pearl District with elementary school services because young families are increasingly opting for the urbanity there, not just singles and empty-nesters, as expected. This positive sign is a result of Portland's investment in public spaces, which increases the livability and value of the housing which flanks it. Memo to developers everywhere: Public realm investment yields land lift. Memo to city halls everywhere: A trip to Portland (and yes, Vancouver) should be a requirement for any person about to enter elected public life.

## DESIGN FOR DESSERT

With Portland's rich urban textures on show in ACSA's tours, conference organizers chose to honor architect-professors from elsewhere on the West Coast with plenary talks to show the buildings they have made while teaching. While architecture schools in the 1990s were obsessed with the aesthetic object and its over-explication in badly borrowed theory, housing has recently returned to a place of respect in our academic design studios.

A sign of this welcome shift was the enthusiastic response Michael Pyatok received from his peers for his lecture highlighting a career dedicated to social housing and community infrastructure construction. The talk was a welcome relief from the "just show slides of my influences and work" conventions of architectural lectures, with a preface that framed our crisis in homelessness and housing affordability with stark figures and bold arguments. Pyatok's Oakland, California-based practice has found ingenious ways to keep producing social housing in the face of under-funding and NIMBY ("Not In My Backyard") rejection, and to make dignified architecture of it. Of particular interest was a series of cultural centers and housing projects for American Indian bands in inner city locations. Advancing an argument about the importance of "cultural sustainability" in housing design, he told of one tribe's choice of a lobby decorative program based on visual symbols from their culture over a rooftop rank of solar collectors that would have cost the same amount. "They made the right choice," said Pyatok.

Pyatok's teaching appointment is at the University of Washington, where the next architect-professor to be honored by ACSA, David Miller, is head of the architecture program. The colleagues drew a laugh when they admitted – despite being down-the-hall neighbors – it had been a decade since





they had seen each other's design work in detail. Detail is the strength of the Miller Hull Partnership, conceived and then improved in iterative fashion in a string of mainly public buildings in the Northwest. The firm was a pioneer in sustainable design, and the range of buildings shown by Miller made it easy to see why they were named by AIA (American Institute of Architects) as one of the nation's best architectural firms.

ACSA Portland concluded with a talk from Patricia Patkau about both her teaching and design work. Through the thesis work from students produced under her direction, Patkau showed that the rigor, conceptual innovation and dry wit of the buildings she has designed with husband-partner John also informs her design teaching. Patkau showed a stunning large house nearing completion on Salt Spring Island near the Canada-US boundary. This design is a tour-de-force of modulated light, view, texture and form that is sure to bring the firm even greater renown when published next year.

Amongst the completed buildings shown was the Patkaus' addition to the Winnipeg Public Library. On an austere budget, the architects found a way to re-surface a klutzy 1970s institution with an invigorating grand stair and cascading pods of study spaces, topping the old building with a great reading room and extension of stacks. With the cultural and economic sustainability of Pyatok, the environmental sustainability dressed in elegant architecture from Miller, and the bravura form-making and design from Patkau, the architecture schools of the Northwest are in unusually good hands these days.

ARCHITECTURE CRITIC TREVOR BODDY IS CURATOR OF THE EXHIBITION *VANCOUVERISM: ARCHITECTURE BUILDS THE CITY* WHICH WILL OPEN IN VANCOUVER, BC AT THE NEW DOWNTOWN WOODWARDS MIXED-USE COMPLEX (HENRIQUEZ PARTNERS) IN NOVEMBER AND RUN THROUGH THE 2010 OLYMPIC WINTER GAMES. [WWW.VANCOUVERISM.CA](http://WWW.VANCOUVERISM.CA)



TOP: DEPARTURE RESTAURANT AND ROOFTOP LOUNGE DESIGNED BY JEFF KOVEL, SKYLAB ARCHITECTS.  
ABOVE: DOUG FIR ROCK CLUB AND RESTAURANT, DESIGNED BY JEFF KOVEL, SKYLAB ARCHITECTS.



# DOWN ON THE CORNER

## suttonberesculler turns a contaminated gas station into sculpture

brendan kiley

John Sutton wants to be very clear: “We are not environmental activists, we are not eco-artists—we’re *artists*.” He repeats this fact (though nobody’s arguing with him) several times during our conversation. He is emphatic.

Yes, he and his Seattle-based art partners Ben Beres and Zac Culler (all of us squeezed around a small table in a noisy bar) want to reclaim an abandoned, contaminated gas station and turn it into a park that exists, as much as it can, off the power grid. Yes, the trio wants to build this island of green on a built-over corner of Georgetown, an industrial/residential Seattle neighborhood on the other side of the usually figurative tracks, with a history of poverty, toxic dumping and municipal neglect. Yes, SuttonBeresCuller (SBC) is wrangling with the EPA, learning about brownfields and soil remediation, and writing grants that describe *Mini Mart City Park* as “the urban landscape... given back to nature” and “not only a truly ‘green’ building but a living work of art.” But don’t call them eco-artists.

These three men are nothing if not intrepid—they’ve trapped themselves in boxes and bags; built a drive-through gallery; locked themselves in a room with thousands of keys outside the door, hoping visitors will find the right one—but they get anxious about what people call them. “We’ve been called pranksters because some of our stuff is funny,” Beres says. “I hate that. We’ve been called performance artists, but we also do photography. We’ve been called conceptual artists, which I don’t mind, though I think of a ‘conceptual artist’ more as a writer, a thinker instead of a doer. We’ve been called frat boys—I mean have you ever seen John try to throw a football?” Beres laughs. “He can’t!”

You could call *Mini Mart City Park* architecture or an installation, earthwork or an intervention. The City of Seattle’s zoning department describes its land as “parks and open space” and its building, curiously, as an “amusement park.” For *ARCADE*, let’s call it sculpture.

The former Pervoich Brothers gas station is a small, rotting building on the corner of Warsaw and Ellis, across the street from a Boeing machine shop and a school for kids who get in trouble. It’s a brownfield – according to Webster’s: “a tract of land that has been developed for industrial purposes, polluted and then abandoned” – and, for years, was a magnet for drug dealers and doers and a rendezvous point for prostitutes and johns. While doing initial cleaning on the site, SBC started a collection of vials and tiny plastic drug-baggies printed with patterns of dollar signs, the Batman logo and skulls in profile on them.

The three artists will keep the building’s façade, replace the wooden walls with concrete and bury the back of the station under a grassy knoll. A pathway will wind to the top of the hill (the ceiling of the building), with benches, trees and a park light powered by solar panels. The interior of the station will be what Beres calls a “blank slate”: A room for gallery shows, installations, readings, events. A door at the buried, back end of the gallery will lead to an underground tunnel – probably with a pool of some kind on its roof – that empties onto the grass. *Mini Mart City Park* will be a building that is a park and a park that is a building, as well as a restoration project, a community center and a contained, three-dimensional object to be admired from a distance.

Like the best SBC projects, *Mini Mart City Park* conflates public and private, outdoor and indoor, building one kind of environment and shoving it into an alien context that reorganizes the way people think about where things belong. SBC specializes in matters out of place and making the familiar foreign.

SBC also creates playful situations that are a little reckless and precarious: For *151 Goldfish* (2000) they balanced 76 fish bowls, with 151 fish, atop a grid of three-foot cedar posts in the woods. For *Three Day Weekend* (2005), they hoisted a glass-bottomed trailer ten feet above a gallery floor and convinced different families to live in it for an evening while an audience gawked below. For *The Island* (also in 2005), they built an ersatz desert island with a palm tree and rocks, set the thing in Lake Washington and lived as castaways in tattered suits with a few days’ supply of food, water and beer. In the process, they severely snarled traffic on the 520 bridge and baffled Seattle-area TV stations. “Are they selling something?” the newscasters kept asking each other. “I don’t know!”

A few more SBC projects, just to give a sense of their variety and accumulated weight: They’ve panhandled in tuxedos with a sign reading “Barely in Need” or with prosthetic ears covering their eyes; built mobile living rooms and parks, set them atop trailers and hauled them around the city; and performed an homage to Joseph Beuys called *I Like Thanksgiving and Thanksgiving Likes Me* that swapped the coyote for a turkey.

**Like the best SBC projects, *Mini Mart City Park* conflates public and private, outdoor and indoor, building one kind of environment and shoving it into an alien context that reorganizes the way people think about where things belong.**

*Mini Mart City Park* is another built environment turned inside out, a building/park mash-up that will turn a brownfield green—if they can secure the funding and permission from local and federal government agencies. The process has been even murkier and slower than you’d think.

“We’re used to throwing shit up, going out on the street, playing by our own rules,” Beres says. “This is so by-the-book. After doing all this, we could probably run for office.”

The project has been on paper since 2005, won a \$50,000 Creative Capital award in 2007 and has been floating on a raft of bureaucracy ever since. An abbreviated list of some of the problems *Mini Mart City Park* has bumped up against:

The first design (to take the roof off and let trees grow up through the inside of the building) had to be scrapped because without a roof to hold it together, the walls would be a wind hazard. And the land is on a “liquification zone” (Georgetown was built on tidal flats), meaning it will turn to quicksand in an earthquake and so requires extremely deep foundations.

There is also a church within 600 feet. Technically you cannot build two “community centers” that close to each other.

The soil itself is toxic from two 2,000-gallon petrol tanks that leaked diesel for years. Boeing used the site to store surplus fuel during WWII, pulled the tanks out later and never did any cleanup. The EPA drilled a dozen core samples, and they all came out filthy with diesel. If the EPA decides the toxins are confined to the site, SBC will have to dig up a massive amount of soil and ship it to Portland for remediation (which involves lacing it with bacteria that eat the petrol and ooze it out into the air of a warehouse, which is then filtered for the poisons). If the EPA decides that petrol “bloom” is just the uniform toxicity of Georgetown soil, leaking onto the lot from elsewhere, they won’t have to scrub the soil. “We want to make it clean and green, but then what’s the point?” Sutton asks. “How long until it gets contaminated?”

“This piece is really intuitive and expressionist,” Culler jokes after running down a litany of bureaucratic issues. “It’s about my relationship with my father.”

SBC has been denied 13 grants in a row because the project sits in a liminal zone that doesn’t quite fit narrow grant specifications (another way in which the nonprofit-grant model can punish expansive thinking). “We decided,” Beres says, “to do this project during the worst economic times of our lives.”

Nearly everyone, from SBC’s architect to its contact at Creative Capital, has marveled that the trio keeps trudging on, despite the logistical problems. *Mini Mart City Park* seems like a ship pushing through Arctic ice—either the shape of the ice will change or the hull will collapse. So far the hull, by sheer force of will, is holding.

“It is bizarre,” Sutton adds, “for us to be three artists trying to raise money to make a gift-wrapped park for Seattle. We’re taking this dumpy, fucked-up building nobody else would touch, and we want to reclaim it for the neighborhood, for the public benefit and artistic health, and actual health, of the community.”

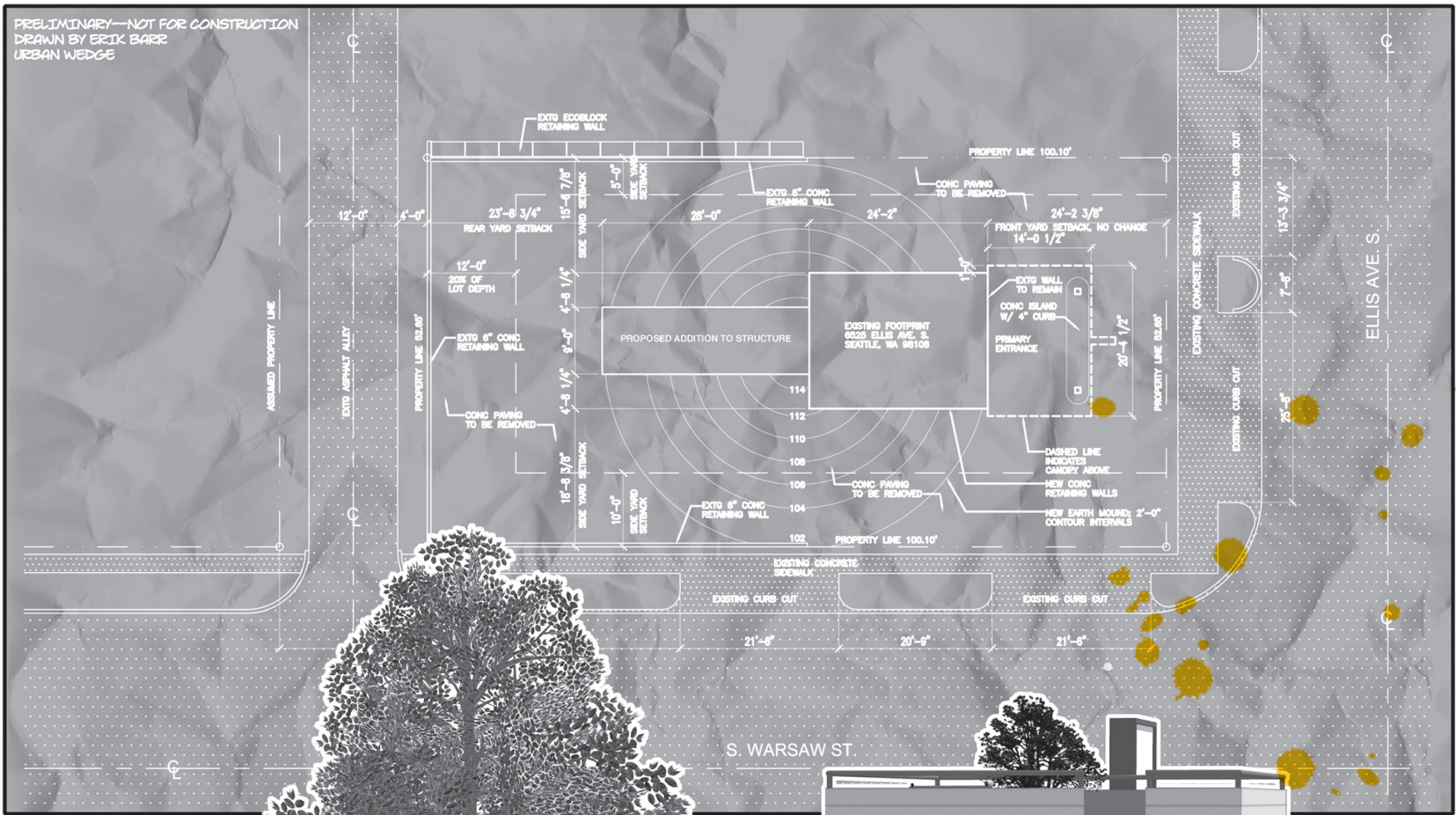
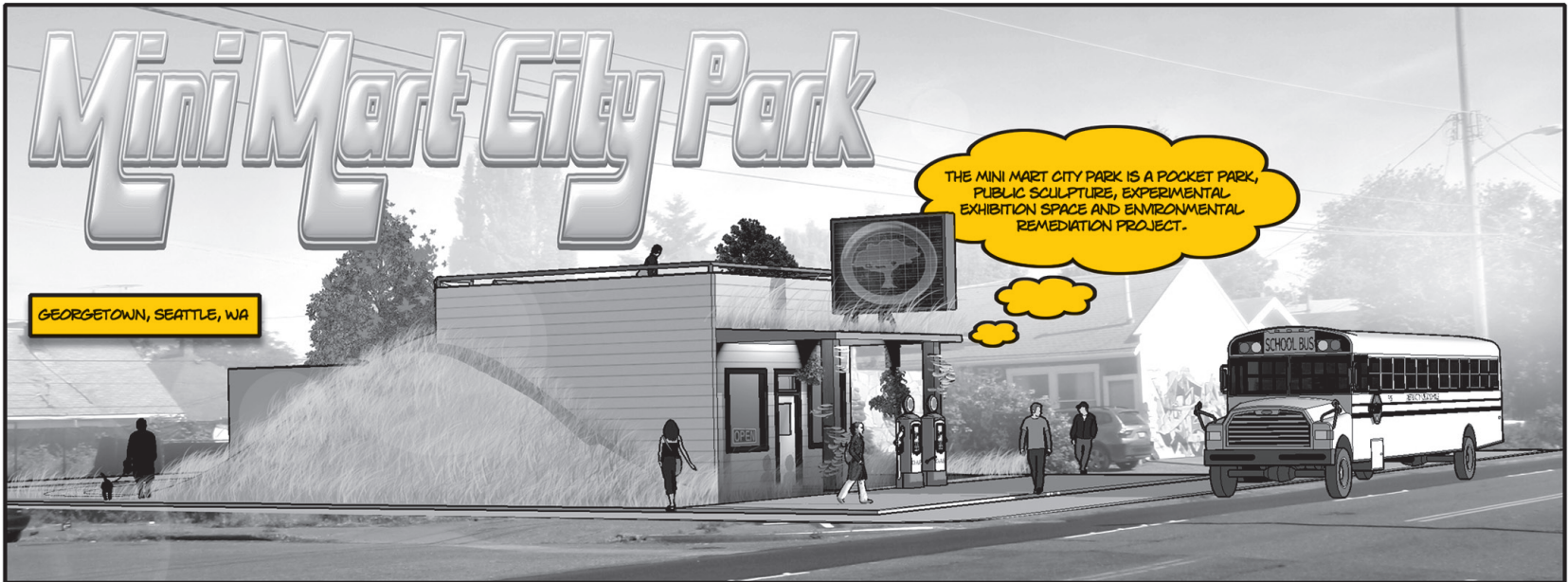
That’s one hell of a sculpture.

*At press time, 4Culture had granted a 2009 Arts Cultural Facilities Award of \$68,000 to SuttonBeresCuller for Mini Mart City Park.*

*Visit [www.minimartcitypark.com](http://www.minimartcitypark.com) for more information or to donate to the project. To learn about SBC’s other projects – which include burying an eight-foot neon sculpture of a double helix, capped with a glass manhole cover, in the middle of downtown Seattle – visit [www.suttonberesculler.com](http://www.suttonberesculler.com).*

BRENDAN KILEY IS THE ARTS EDITOR OF *THE STRANGER*.





# Sutton BeresCuller



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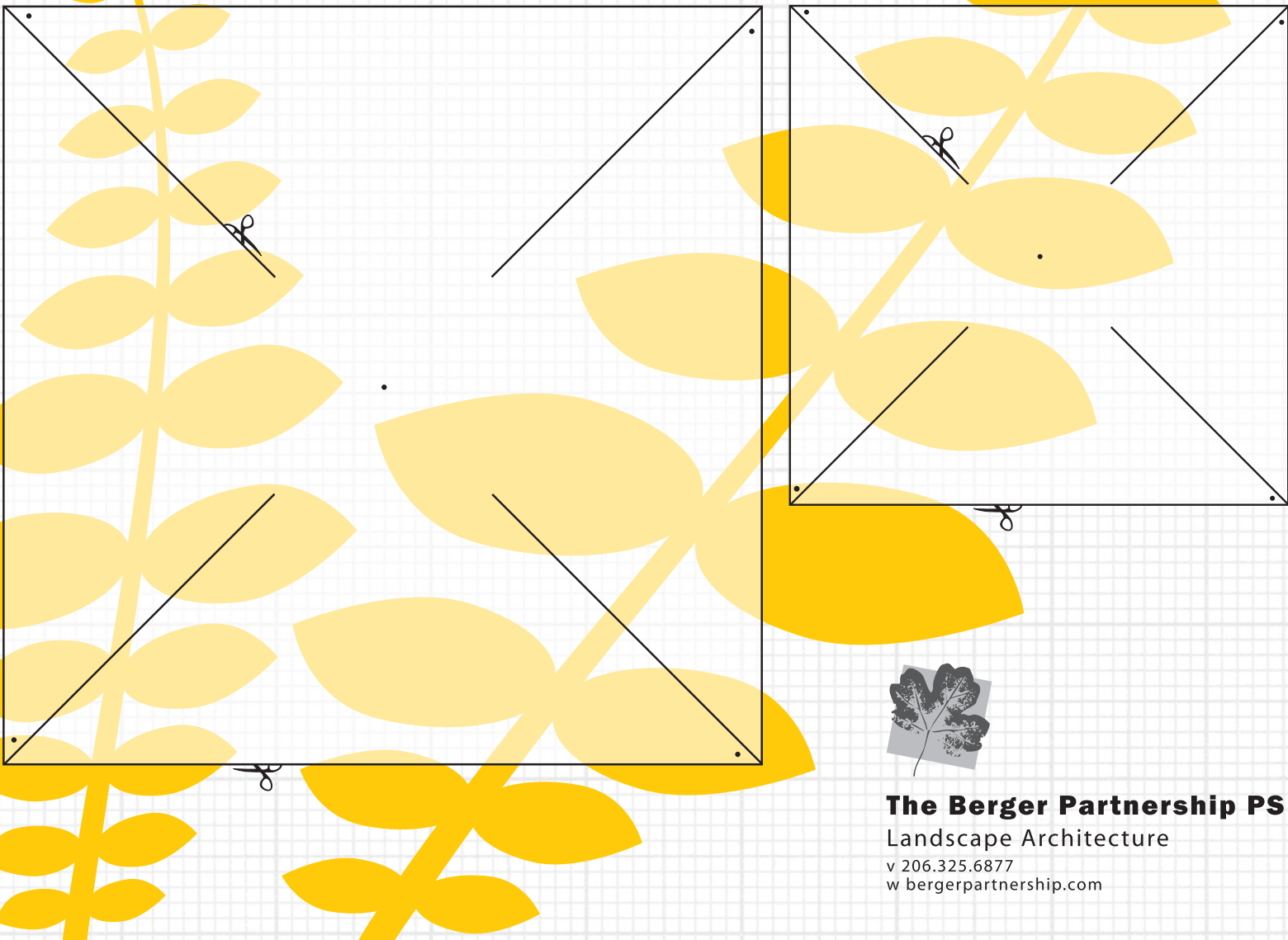
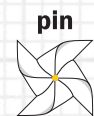
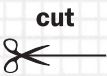
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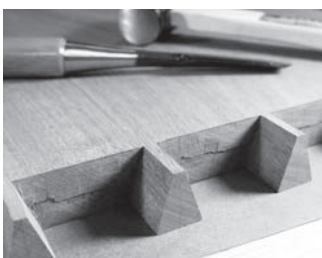


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# NO TIME





# TO WASTE

JONATHAN GOLOB

When I asked Professor Robert Crabtree — a Yale scientist who is developing “carbon neutral fuel to combat climate change” — what he thinks people should do right away to make the world a better place, he answered: “Live more simply.” A simple answer exists for a difficult question. The crisis of water and air pollution, overproduction and climate change has one of its main solutions in humans living with less and living simply. But it is not easy for us as a culture to live in a way that is completely different from how we do currently (exorbitantly, like there’s no tomorrow). To begin with, it requires a radical transformation of our grounding ethics. We need a new ethic, a new foundation of behavior (or habit, the original meaning of *ethos*) that sees virtue in consuming, moving and building simply. But radical social change can only happen if each person understands that it really does come down to his or her actions. Everything each of us does is not independent of, but connected to the crisis confronting the world today. And what is this crisis? It is an energy, water, transportation, housing and urban crisis. It is a crisis that is well on its way to becoming a complete disaster for both humans and other forms of life. This issue of *ARCADE* offers a broad picture of this escalating crisis and some solutions. And what unifies these solutions is the idea of living simply.

CHARLES MUDEDE





## THE STATE OF THE WORLD

We no longer need computers to predict climate change; we can observe it directly. We can see the drying up lakebeds, the melting glaciers, the declining snowpack and the increasing average surface temperatures. The planet's climate is changing at a breathtaking pace, with humanity at the center of the maelstrom. Pre-industrial revolution, atmospheric carbon dioxide was about 260 parts per million; today it stands at about 370 parts per million. Only about 20 percent of the carbon dioxide we emit remains in the air. Nearly four-fifths ends up dissolved in the oceans, acidifying the water to the point of causing a widespread slaughter of shelled sea creatures. Because of this vast store of carbon dioxide we've forced into the oceans, even if we managed to stop adding carbon to the air, the consequences would remain for at least a millennium. In spite of all this, carbon emissions march upwards, increasing by about two percent per year in defiance of the best political efforts to counter it. We're past the point of debating whether climate change is real; we've wasted enough time on these false questions. Now is the time to anticipate what these changes will mean for our lives, our communities and our futures.

Where is all this carbon coming from? To really understand our present predicament, one has to go back about four hundred million years, to the start of the carboniferous era. At this time, plants beset by insects evolved lignin, the fiber that makes tree bark. Lignin was toxic and tough, and thus nearly impenetrable—a perfect solution to the pest problem. The first bark-bearing trees dominated the surface of the planet.

All living things are made up of chains of hydrogen and carbon; plants create these chains by capturing the energy from the sun and carbon from carbon dioxide, releasing oxygen as a waste product. When consumed by another creature, these chains are combined with oxygen and broken down for energy, releasing carbon dioxide as a waste product. This energy is then used to build up new chains of hydrogen and carbon, creating the respiratory cycle. Nothing alive could consume the lignin. It built up in vast quantities, layering strata after strata of the planet's surface—and the dead tree bark became locked deep within the rocks of the earth. The hydrogen and carbon chains making up the lignin were exiting the respiratory cycle, leaving excess oxygen with nowhere to go. Gently, the atmosphere began to change, with oxygen levels creeping upwards, eventually to a peak of around 35% of all the gases in the air. (By comparison, Oxygen is about 21% of our present atmosphere.) Some of the increased oxygen in the atmosphere dissolved into the oceans, causing the free iron in the oceans to rust—wreaking havoc on organisms large and small dependent upon unrusted, free iron to function. Elaborate mechanisms to capture iron became advantageous. (To this day, if you drop free iron on a patch of ocean, you can cause a bloom in life that hasn't seen success since the much earlier, less oxygenated and more free-iron-rich seas.) Wildfires became far more explosive—fueled by the oxygen-rich atmosphere. Huge animals could evolve in the oxygen-rich atmosphere—the megafauna we only know by fossilized skeletons.

The changes these first lignin-containing trees wreaked upon the atmosphere were on a scale similar to the changes industrial human activity is starting to cause. Life and the

composition of the planet itself were altered in a way that echoes to the present. Eventually, about a hundred-million years after the evolution of lignin, fungi evolved the ability to eat up lignin. Dead trees littering the surface became food for these fungi. The long-buried indigestible lignin became the coal humanity has burned since the advent of the industrial revolution. Each year our fossil-fueled society consumes about a 500 years worth of this ancient photosynthesis. We're industrially capturing the energy stored long ago in the unpalatable lignin, releasing the long-trapped carbon that is at the center of our current environment crisis.

Massive changes to the atmosphere are nothing new. The pace of this human-caused change is what makes it unique. To the best scientific knowledge, the changes to the atmosphere caused by human industrialization are occurring at the fastest pace ever. While the changes created by the trees were equally as dramatic, they were gradually spread over thousands, if not millions, of years. Such a rate of change gave other life forms, and the planet itself, time to adjust and adapt (such as the evolution of and selection for iron-capturing mechanisms). Our current – and still accelerating – atmospheric change is happening too quickly for life in general, and perhaps humanity itself, to adapt to meet the new challenges and take advantage of new opportunities.

We must slow the pace of change we're imparting on the atmosphere to purchase more time to prepare. Decreasing the global carbon emissions per year remains an elusive goal; even slowing the pace of increase would help. That means less per-capita consumption of fossil fuels in the developed world—through increased efficiency in our vehicles and homes, more modest living, more seasonal and local eating and the rapid development of alternative energy sources. The trees can be our allies. An acre replanted with trees removes a metric ton of carbon from the atmosphere per year.

In short, we have no time to waste because we have run out of time.



### THE ESSENTIAL PROBLEM

Humanity will feel climate change mostly through water. Our cities (and most humans now live in cities) are manmade rivers, drawing freshwater in and depositing wastewater out. Our highly productive industrial farms are similarly dependent upon a mastery of what once flowed by chance. Much of the infrastructure and engineering that makes daily miracles possible – like a cheap meal or abundant potable tap water – are based on the assumption of regularity in our environment. The rains will come in a certain pattern, at a certain time and in a certain amount. The mountains will get renewing snows each winter. The ocean currents will stay the same as they have been since the dawn of recorded history. (Europe's mild climate depends upon them.) The trade winds too will remain unchanged.

Averaged out, the predicted changes are worrisome. With increasing average surface temperatures, the water of the oceans will expand as warmer water takes up more space. Even without a cataclysmic melting of the Antarctic or Greenland ice sheets into the oceans, we can expect sea levels to rise by nearly a meter due to thermal expansion alone. As the oceans warm up, the winds and currents upon which we depend are at risk of disappearing or changing course.

The projections of how the climate will change in the coming decades are not simple stories of warmer weather. Rather, we can expect greater variation in just about everything. The November 2007 International Panel on Climate Change report noted human influences on the climate, "more likely than not increased the risk of heat waves, area affected by drought since 1970 and frequency of heavy precipitation events." What we are likely to miss the most is the relative calm and equilibrium of the era we are bringing to a close. With greater variation in the weather, recreating our daily miracles is going to become vastly more challenging. What nature once buffered for us, we will now have to buffer ourselves.

### THE ANSWER

It's too late. Climate change is already happening. The damage to the atmosphere and oceans is done. How can we reshape our communities, our industries, our economies and our futures around this new, harsher reality? How can we modify our use of existing structures? These are the questions of the moment, the frightening implications for our lives, our society

and our futures. Answering them starts by grappling with this new reality, with our new, crueler, relationship with water. We've lived profligate lives. If we are to act now, we must act on water, the core of the crisis. These changes to the climate are going to leave us with fewer resources to spend, resources that will be purchased at an ever-increasing cost.

Our diets must change. Our meat-rich diet is simply unsustainable in the new reality we are now facing. A single cheeseburger releases about a kilogram of carbon equivalent into the atmosphere. (A Sunday newspaper, by comparison, only releases about a tenth as much carbon.) Growing a pound of cow, pig or chicken consumes vastly more pounds of plant matter. We've had crops to spare thanks to green revolution, at its core a program of intensive monocultures dependent upon aggressive irrigation and fertilization. Even now, before we've felt the full brunt of the climate change to come, aquifers are drying up, reservoirs are draining and rivers dwindling. In the near future, we will no longer have the fresh water to generate the vast surpluses of crops. If we are to avoid famine, we must reduce the amount we demand of the earth.

Driving alone in automobiles to work, to shops, to the grocery store, to our schools and to our pleasure must stop. Driving a car cannot be made efficient. It's a matter of simple physics; moving a hundred kilograms of you around in a couple thousand kilograms of glass, steel and plastic will never be efficient. The energy we waste on inefficient daily travel will continue, for the foreseeable future, to come from fossil fuels. The carbon these energy sources release into the atmosphere will hasten the devastating changes in water patterns, exacerbating an already daunting problem. Hybrids, and other clever marketing gimmicks, cannot rewrite the laws of momentum and efficiency. We must start walking, riding bikes or taking mass or public transit.

We must start building and living in communities that reflect these changes in diet and daily travel. Communities of endlessly sprawling suburbs, requiring trips in cars for even the most mundane tasks, are of a time when fuel, food and water were plentiful and cheap. Heating, cooling and providing utilities to a solitary house built deep into a prairie, desert or foothill will become an increasingly herculean task, as our energy and water supplies become scarcer and more costly. If we wish to continue to live well, we must live well with less. Living in a tight, dense, beautifully human city is the best and easiest path to that end.

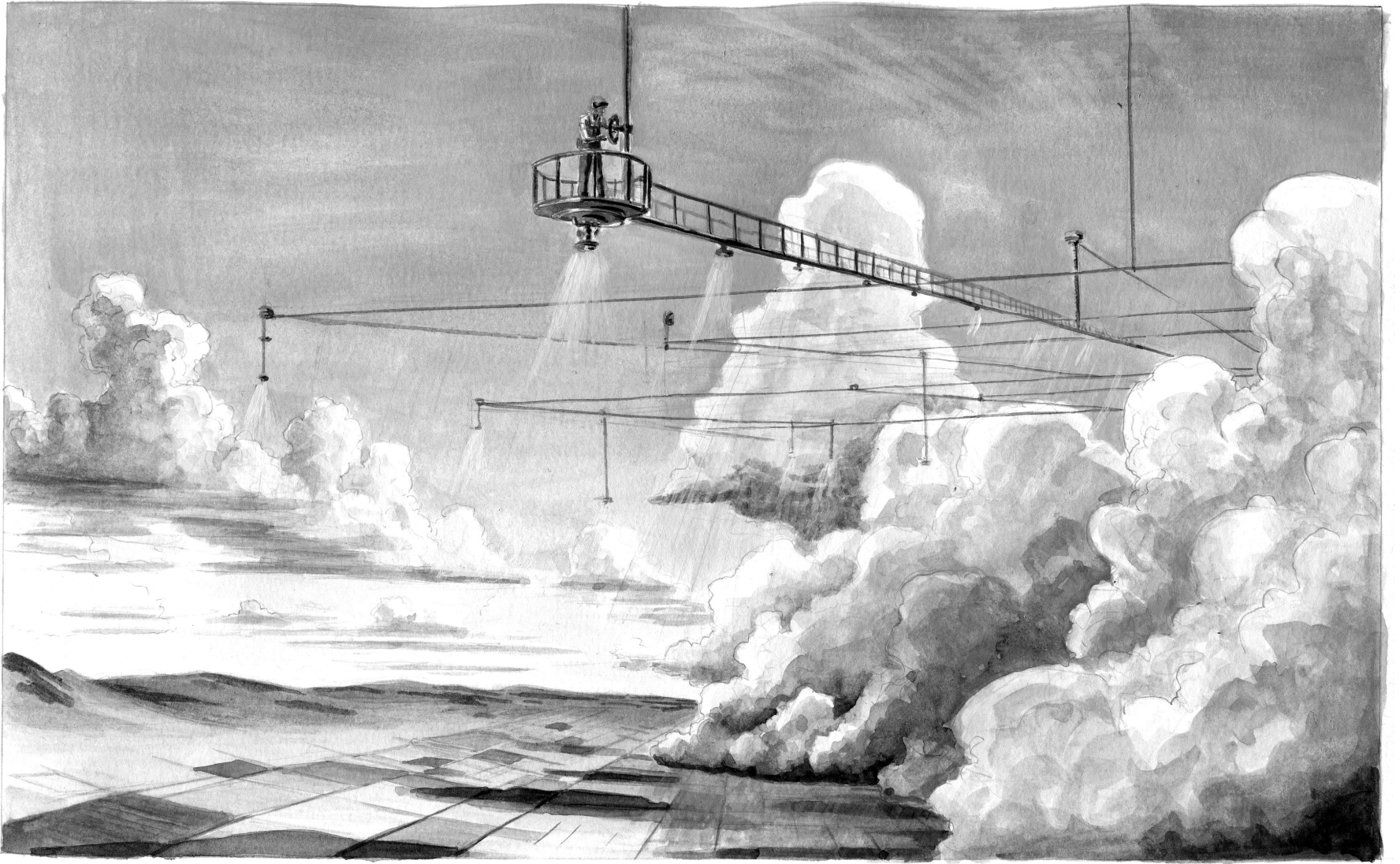
**And we must deepen our understanding of water itself. The deceptively simple molecule continues to surprise scientists. Place a pure glass of water in sunlight, and it will become darker and more viscous over a period of days. At the very tattered frontiers of science, we're discovering a fourth state of water (beyond ice, liquid water and steam) with liquid crystal-like properties that explains these and other mysterious properties of the single most important molecule for life. Societies that study the world, that heed the results of the studies and adapt to the changes they observe, thrive; those that don't collapse. If we are to succeed, it will take a redoubling of efforts to understand and consider our world clearly.**

**Through research, planning and slowing the pace of change, we have a chance to save ourselves from catastrophe.**

CHARLES MUDEDE IS THE ASSOCIATE EDITOR FOR THE SEATTLE-BASED WEEKLY *THE STRANGER*, AND LECTURER IN ENGLISH HUMANITIES AT PACIFIC LUTHERAN UNIVERSITY. HIS *POLICE BEAT* COLUMN WAS MADE INTO A FILM OF THE SAME NAME IN 2004. THE MOVIE WAS SELECTED FOR COMPETITION AT THE SUNDANCE FILM FESTIVAL, 2005. IN 2003, MUDEDE PUBLISHED A SHORT BOOK CALLED *LAST SEEN* WITH DIANA GEORGE. HE WAS ALSO A MEMBER OF THE NOW DEFUNCT SEATTLE RESEARCH INSTITUTE. SRI PUBLISHED TWO BOOKS, *POLITICS WITHOUT THE STATE* AND *EXPERIMENTAL THEOLOGY*. MUDEDE'S WORK HAS APPEARED IN *THE NEW YORK TIMES*, *THE VILLAGE VOICE*, *LA WEEKLY*, AND *CTHEORY*.

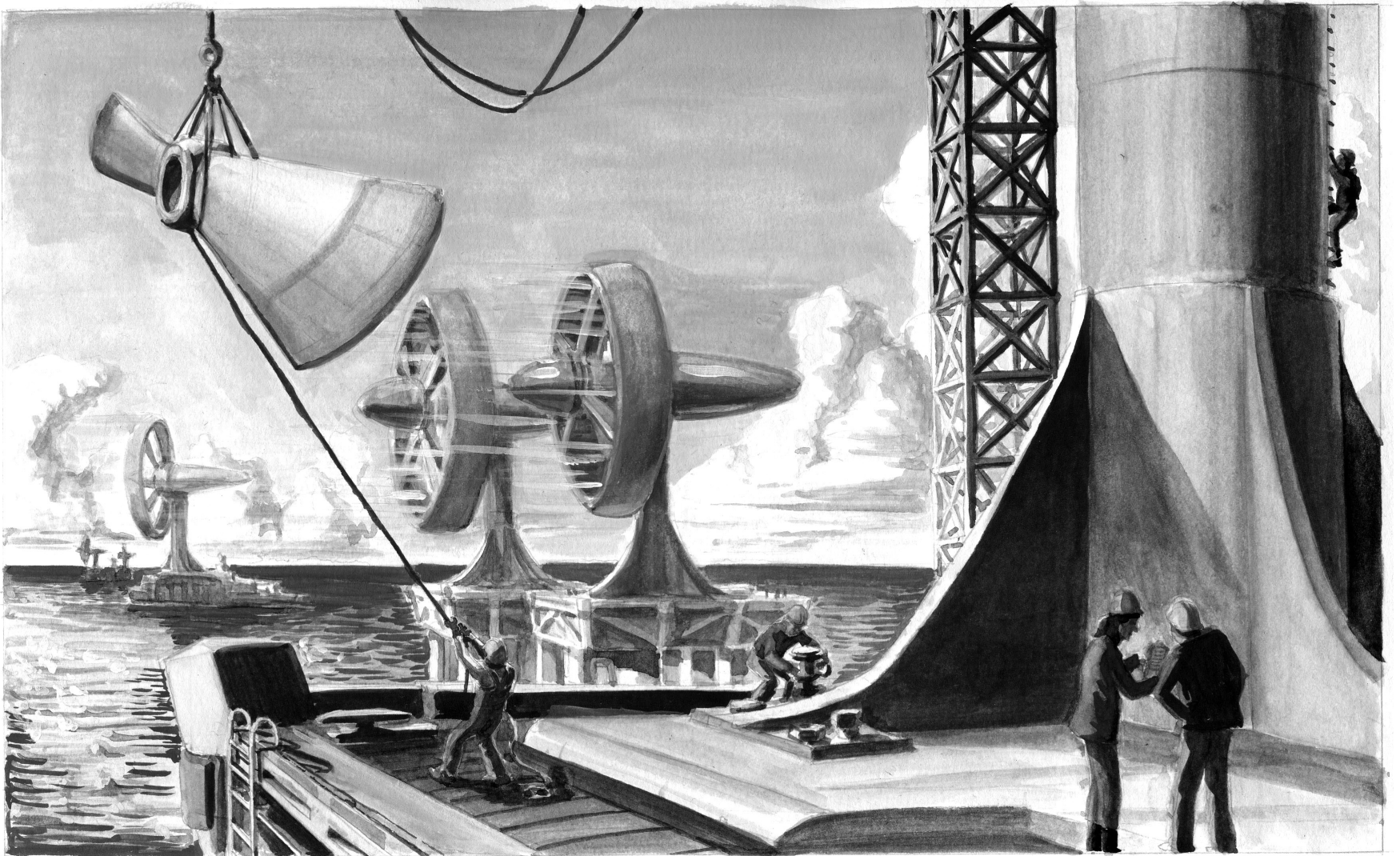
JONATHAN GOLOB SPENT HIS CHILDHOOD IN SUBURBAN DETROIT, GRADUATING FROM THE CRANBROOK HIGH SCHOOL. AT THE JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY, HE EARNED DUAL BACHELORS OF SCIENCE IN THE FIELDS OF BIOMEDICAL ENGINEERING AND COMPUTER SCIENCE. IN ADDITION TO HIS ENGINEERING COURSEWORK, JONATHAN ALSO ENGAGED IN MANY CHALLENGING HISTORY, POLITICAL SCIENCE AND SOCIOLOGY COURSES, OFTEN AS THE ONLY ENGINEERING STUDENT IN THE ROOM. JONATHAN BEGAN HIS MD/PHD TRAINING IN THE UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON'S MEDICAL SCIENTIST TRAINING PROGRAM IN THE SPRING OF 2001. HE HAS RECENTLY COMPLETED HIS PHD IN DR. CHARLES MURRY'S LABORATORY, STUDYING HOW CELLS ESTABLISH AND REMEMBER THEIR IDENTITIES.





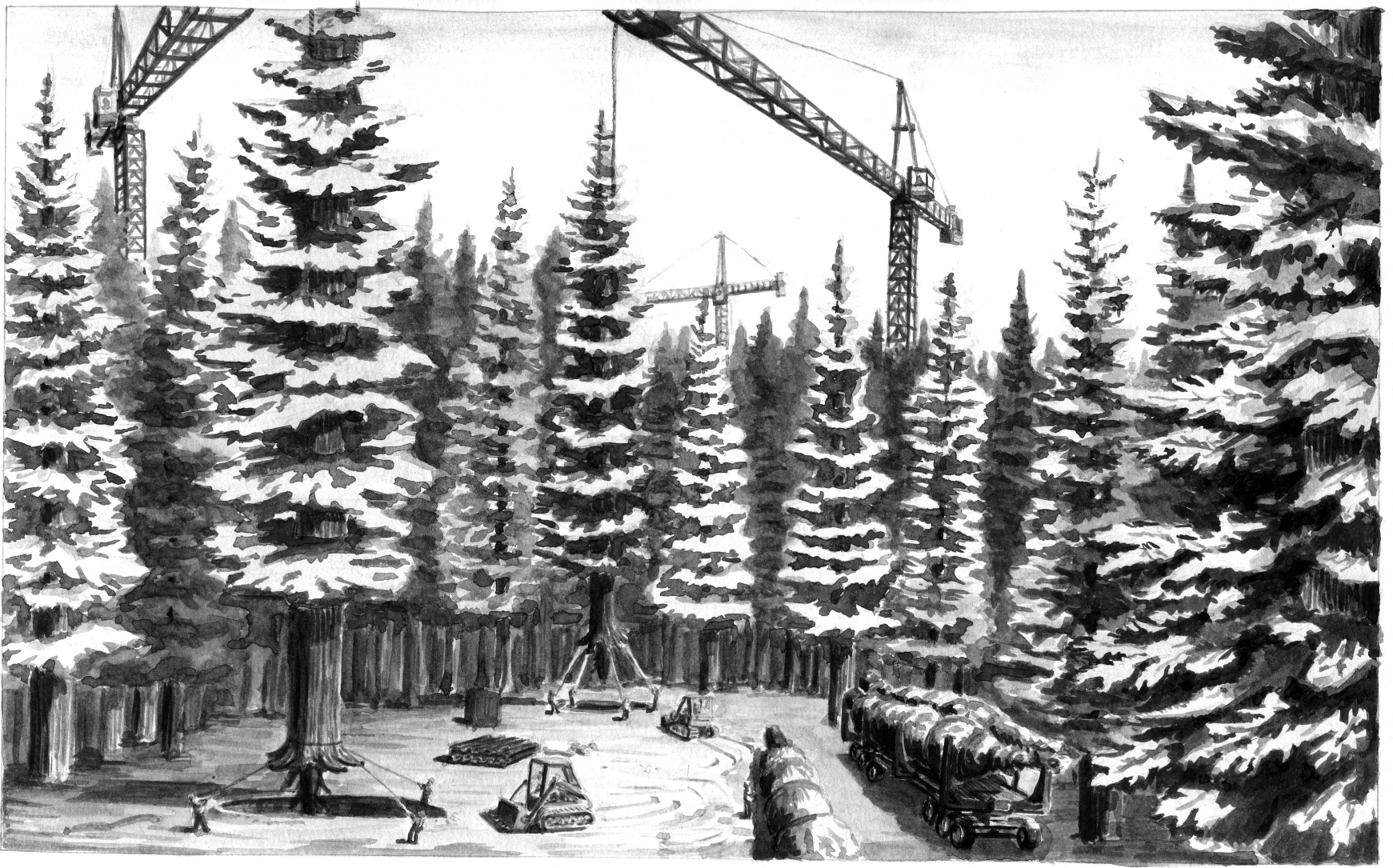
# ENGINEERING THE ENVIRONMENT

CHARLES MUDEDE WITH DRAWINGS BY JED DUNKERLY



TOP: MID-ALTITUDE RAIN GRID, NEBRASKA STATE PUBLIC UTILITIES, SOUTH PLATTE PRECIPITATION DIVISION. ABOVE: OFFSHORE WIND RIGS, ATLANTIC MUTUAL AIR CURRENT COMPANY. RIGHT: FIR AND HEMLOCK OLD GROWTH PLANTING, CANADIAN MINISTRY OF VINTAGE FORESTS.





In a recent University of Washington lecture titled “Who Will Build the Ark? The Architectural Imagination in an Age of Catastrophic Convergence,” urban theorist and Marxist Mike Davis pointed out that:

*...qualities that are most classically urban [public space, density, public transportation, recycling]... combine to generate a virtuous circle. Urban growth preserves open space and thus vital natural systems...*

One can find no disagreement with the assertion that the new, green virtues are in essence “classically urban.” The chief Urban Designer of New York City, Alexandros Washburn, calls them “civic virtues,” or qualities that make for a better, more “urbane” and “natural” city: building green, using mass transit, restoring purity to our water and air, providing park access for all.

This is all well and good.

But one can find some disagreement with Mike Davis’s suggestion that urban growth, by “preserv[ing] open space” also preserves “vital natural systems.”

The idea is based on the logic that by concentrating humans in cities, nature is left alone to do its business and recover its life-generating powers without disturbance. Again, this is classic urban growth theory. However, such a retreat seems more of an abandonment than a solution to our environmental problems. Even worse, such a reading of nature – as something that is best left alone by humans – is more romantic than realistic. Nature is not an area that is outside of human society but is continuous with it. To put it frankly, any human interaction with nature is natural because it happens in nature.

**To focus all our environmental energies on cities is to ignore the fact that we are tied to the future of nature. We cannot leave it alone as if we’re not a part of it. We must intervene, manipulate, interact with the world of trees, volcanoes and clouds.**

(As a note: nature itself is not always green. There is new scientific thinking that blames salt lakes for the greatest mass extinction in the history of the earth: 250 million years ago, halogenated gases from the surfaces of the lakes choked the atmosphere and killed 90 percent of life on the planet.)

To focus all our environmental energies on cities is to ignore the fact that we are tied to the future of nature. We cannot leave it alone as if we’re not a part of it. We must intervene, manipulate, interact with the world of trees, volcanoes and clouds.

A quick look at the drawings by the local artist Jed Dunkerly captures the substance of this future. At first sight, his cloud engineers, rain laborers and tree construction sites might seem surreal and even funny. But their proximity to the sober truth is immediately made clear when we place the drawings next to the comments made by the White House’s scientific advisor, the physicist John Holdren, shortly after he was confirmed in March 2009. The comments concerned what he calls “geoengineering.” To combat the dangerous affects of global warming, he is seriously considering massive projects like “launching sulfur particles into the atmosphere,” which would basically mimic “the effect of volcanoes in screening out the incoming sunlight”; and also turning “giant towers into artificial trees that suck carbon dioxide out of the air.” An increasing number of people at the top are relocating geoengineering from the realm of science fiction to the heart of reality. But for geoengineering to work, to have an impact, the general thinking about nature needs to change. The public and policy makers have to see nature not as fixed but plastic.

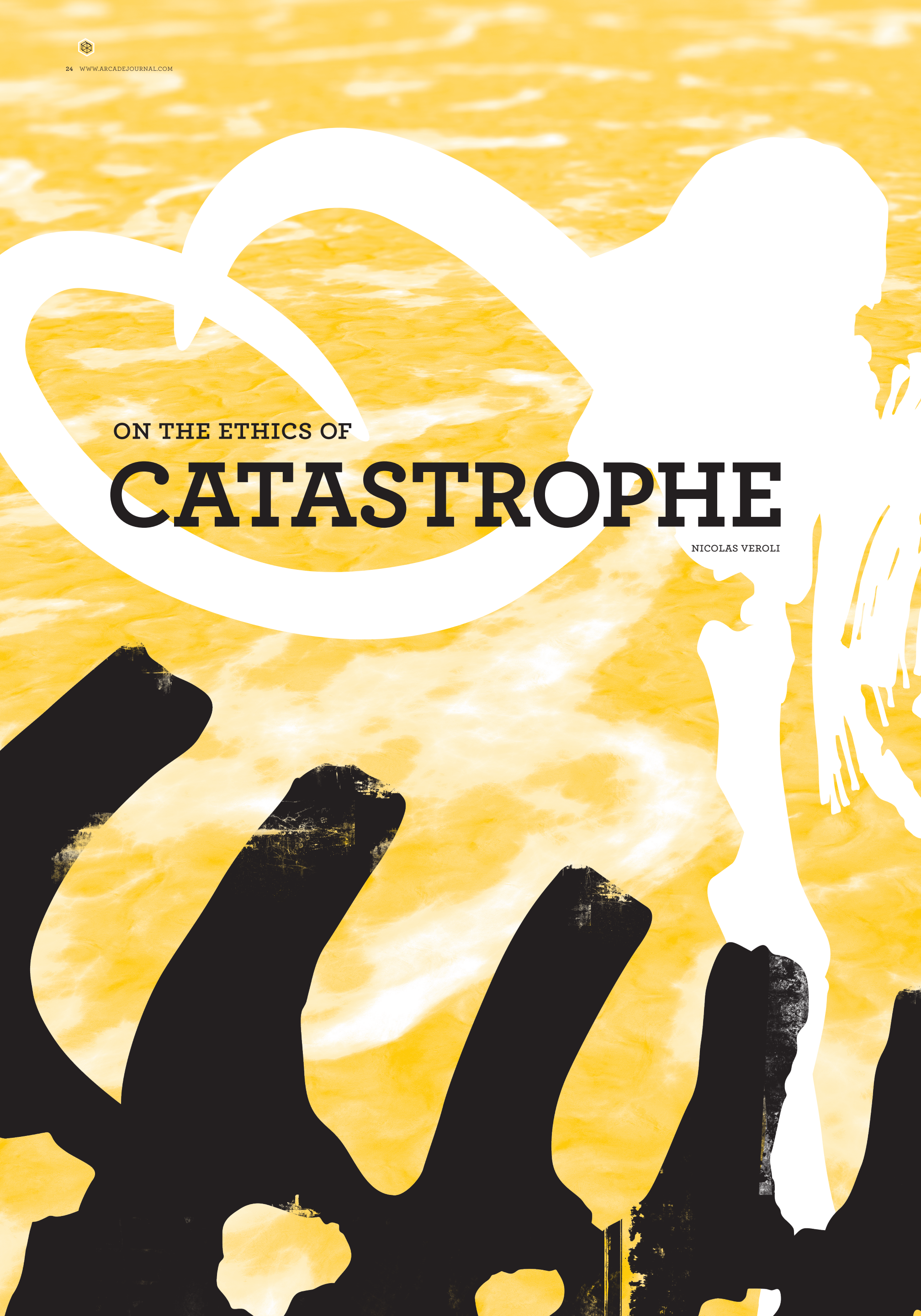
Human nature is also a part of nature.





ON THE ETHICS OF  
**CATASTROPHE**

NICOLAS VEROLI





**Crisis is in the air. As the global economy crumbles and as the planetary ecology evaporates, the question of what kind of historical moment we are living through becomes contemporary again. Are we living through a catastrophic age? And if so, what should we do? What is our responsibility? Or, on the contrary, is the appearance of universal catastrophe a design, an optical illusion painted on the wall of the future?**

Everything seems to suggest that a universal catastrophe is upon us. At this moment in time, the Dow Jones industrial average, the index of US industrial activity, has lost half of its value in less than a year. The economic mechanism that has held up American consumerism through loans over the past 30 years, the finance and banking industry, is at a standstill, and at least according to some experts, in large part out of business. Unemployment is reaching double-digit levels in many parts of the country, and along with it, of course, there come increases in home evictions, poverty and hunger. And all this, as it turns out, is a rather mild version of what's happening throughout the rest of the world: Entire countries are going bankrupt or are on the brink of bankruptcy, their economies merrily restructured by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) – which does not seem to have heard the death knell of neoliberalism – tens of millions more people thereby sinking into all-too-predictable destitution.

Meanwhile, symptoms of Global Warming are suggesting that even if the economic logic of consumer capitalism and its foundational institutions could somehow be salvaged, a persistent use of the fossil fuel-based technologies that constitute its actual substance (from anything made of plastic to cars to most power plants) will result in massive ecological imbalances, and, quite possibly, the extinction of human life.

One might even argue here that Obama's "Green New Deal," while it will go some way toward reducing Carbon emissions – how much and how fast, however, is not quite clear – will do little to the economic structure of capitalism since it is largely premised on re-establishing the *status quo ante*. But it is precisely this system – premised as it was on ever-increasing consumption of commodities produced in the Third World by an ever-more impoverished middle class in the First (which is precisely where lending came in) – that is no longer an option.

Catastrophe thus does seem the order of the day. Environmental prophets are screaming it to whoever will listen; religious prophets (all denominations included) are depicting it in the terms of their favorite image, that of The Apocalypse. Even the Marxist prophets are here for the reunion, resurrected it seems, especially for the occasion, to rub their hands in terminal glee.

But if we take a step back for a moment, if we ask ourselves precisely what is a "catastrophe," this interpretation – let us call it the catastrophist interpretation – seems substantially less compelling.

When you think about it, the concept of "catastrophe" is rather paradoxical. On the one hand, catastrophe is a category of history. It denotes a historically identifiable event—the extinction of the dinosaurs, for instance, or the collapse of the Roman Empire. On the other hand, it is a category of history which designates the end of what it belongs to: Namely, the end of the historical process. After that famous meteor shower that had catastrophe written all over it, for instance, the history of the dinosaurs came to an end. The catastrophe is thus both inside and outside history. It exists in history, however, only as the after-image of the end, a phantasmagorical image of something that happened – or more precisely, that *stopped* happening – in the past, projected ever-forward in the future. The perceived or divined catastrophe is both a symptom of humans' remarkable consciousness of their mortality and the projection of their greatest fears into a future that is ultimately indecipherable.

But the real catastrophe, the Real of the catastrophe to speak the language of the philosophers, is only retrospective, it is only what can be recorded retrospectively about someone or something else. No one lives through a catastrophe: That is the definition of catastrophe.

So this is one problem with the catastrophist thesis: The catastrophe cannot be lived in the present. It can only be remembered as an abstract historical memory. Or, it can be experienced as a fantasy of the future, in the mode of science fiction, so to speak.

The other problem with the view that we are living through a catastrophe today is that it is a lie, what in more "sophisticated" language one might call a mystification. Think about it this way: Bankers, Wall Street wizards, various industry lobbyists and their flunkies (who compose most of the political establishment), as well as a full supply of academic geniuses inhabiting social science and philosophy departments have been crowing in the same choir for 30 years or so. Let's call all these people the elite. Their song? A paean to the free market, consumerism, ceaseless economic growth (and the endless construction of ugly malls, ugly houses, ugly buildings that accompanies it), deregulation, privatization—a song whose chorus was "There Is No Alternative," or TINA.

Now, in common parlance, a catastrophe is no one's fault; it is unforeseen and thus unavoidable. But that is precisely what the current situation never was. Global Warming and environmental collapse have been known quantities since the early 1970s. By 1981 there were federal government scientists who were filing official reports predicting that if significant reductions in greenhouse gases were not made in the medium term, really bad things would start to happen.

The global economic meltdown critics like Susan George were starting to get the picture of what would happen by the mid-80s, as they studied the result of neoliberal policies imposed by the IMF/World Bank complex on Southern countries like Nigeria and Mexico that were defaulting on their international debt. It was then that many people started realizing that the financialization of the world economy, the emphasis on American consumption (fueled by personal credit) as the solution to ever-increasing productivity (premised on a stagnant or shrinking global wage) was a recipe for disaster. By the late 90s and the crisis of the so-called "Asian Tigers" (South Korea, Malaysia, Singapore, etc.) the writing was on the wall. No one needed to be a genius, then, to see that sooner or later this situation would no longer be tenable. The housing market was a stop-gap that lasted just long enough to get George W. Bush re-elected, but here again it wasn't difficult for whoever wanted to see what was happening to get the picture.

Thus, neither global warming nor the world-economic depression we are now entering can seriously be called catastrophes. They were avoidable and they could have been avoided... had it not been, that is, for the nature of elite rule.

So the first thing we must do is refuse the catastrophist premise in all of its practical and existential implications. Yes, climate change is going to happen, and yes, we are going to have to change the way we consume, move and live. We must have limits on how we spend and on what and how we buy. Cars must become our dinosaurs. And cities must become more efficient with water and power. But these changes are not bad; they are by no means catastrophes.

NICOLAS VEROLI IS A POLITICAL PHILOSOPHER. HE LIVES IN UPSTATE NEW YORK AND TEACHES AT SEVERAL STATE PENITENTIARIES. HE IS CURRENTLY WRITING A BOOK ON THE DREAMLIFE OF SOVEREIGNTY. HE HAS PUBLISHED CRITICISM IN MAGAZINES SUCH AS *THE STRANGER* AND *THE PORTLAND MERCURY* AND THEORETICAL AND HISTORICAL ARTICLES IN ACADEMIC JOURNALS SUCH AS *INTERNATIONAL STUDIES IN PHILOSOPHY*, *THE CLR JAMES JOURNAL*, AND *IJELE: A JOURNAL OF AFRICAN AESTHETICS*.





ABOVE PHOTOS: DJ SPOOKY

# THE FUTURE OF ARCTIC ICE

JONATHAN GOLOB

It took about two centuries after Lewis and Clark, but finally Americans have discovered the Northwest Passage. All it took was the industrial revolution and a whole lot of carbon emissions. In the past few summers, and for the first time in recorded history, the Arctic has been ice-free; some computer models predict it will be ice-free year round in not too many decades. The open Arctic Ocean provides new, shorter shipping lanes between North America and Europe and opportunities to drill undersea for yet more fossil fuels. The melting of the Arctic ice won't raise sea levels (the ice was already floating), but it's a stark image of the changes we've caused.

Ice worldwide is on the retreat, with glaciers shrinking in response to rising average temperatures. For places like the Pacific Northwest that are dependent upon glaciers for drinking water, hydropower and irrigation, the shrinking reserves of ice present a terrifying problem. Ice and snow act as a natural buffer and reservoir. As more and more precipitation falls as flooding rains rather than deep snows, more effort will be required to store what nature once kept in reserve for us.



THE FUTURE OF

# CONCRETE

CHARLES MUDEDE

In our globalized moment, what we see again and again is an emphasis on the local. Our current climate crisis finds one of its main solutions in decreasing the distance between sites of production and sites of consumption. This direction, which is now impacting the way we think about eating, moving and building, challenges a central agenda of the century-long modernist project: mass standardization and the centralization of production. What was broken by serialization, minimalism, concentration and increased efficiency was the human dependence on the older rhythms of nature.

What was 19th century England but a period and locus of the world's first major break from the limits of space and time—in short, from prehuman nature? Steamships finally made scheduling realistic (powered ships could beat the absolute challenges of nature and arrive right on time), and factory production could run at fixed hours during the course of the entire year (with agricultural production, winter meant fewer hours and summer more). What modernity promised was a world that standardized housing, food and transportation.

We are now moving toward an enlightened dark age. How else do we understand a significant part of the green revolution but as a devolution, as a movement toward where we were in the past? The urban ideal in the 21st century is fast becoming a supply zone that does not extend far beyond a city's borders. In ancient Greece, Aristotle took this proximity between agricultural production and consumption very seriously. He saw it as a threat to the integrity of democracy. He knew the city had to deal with the concerns of the food producers just outside of its walls. The city that emerged after the 19th century forgot this form of political anxiety. Seattle, for example, has a supply shadow that extends to the Western Cape. Walk into any supermarket, and you'll find wines from South Africa. But this flattening of global production, competition and commodity circulation, which was once the mark of progress, has hit a limit—the world cannot sustain it. If you want to buy wine, the green thing to do is to buy it from producers in Columbia Valley.

Concrete offers an example of the virtues of propinquity between sites of consumption and production. The two virtues of this substance, the very stuff of civilization, is that most of its materials can be extracted from areas that are close to the city. This means the energy requirement for transport is low. A city can build itself up from the earth around it. Also, concrete can be recycled. This means a city can build itself up from what it is already made of. These were not a part of the modernist program of standardization and concentration, but they were certainly a part of the pre-modern city—a city that had limited resources and means of storage and a supply shadow that was regional rather than international.

But with the return to the past, the green revolution has a futurist component. Because all of the problems cannot be resolved by nearness – the reduction of transportation distances – and reuse, we have to turn to invention. For example, the main problem with concrete is its core ingredient, cement—the other two are stone and water. Though typically accounting for 12 percent of the stuff in concrete, cement has a terrific energy requirement. About 92 percent of the energy needed to make concrete is used in cement production. Globally, that adds up to around 1.6 billion tons of CO<sub>2</sub>—meaning nearly 10 percent of human CO<sub>2</sub> emissions results from the production of cement. No amount of propinquity or recycling can seriously reverse this impact. So, if we are to continue building our cities with concrete, we must change the very way it is made. We have to turn to science.

At this moment, Stanford professor Brent Constantz, the man who invented medical cement, is working on a cement that he claims will not only have zero carbon emissions, but the very manner of manufacturing it will remove (sequester) carbon from the atmosphere. Though it sounds too good to be true, Constantz is funded by a hugely successful venture capitalist, Vinod Khosla. But whether the project is a success or not, what it makes clear is that many of the environmental problems we face today will be solved by research and invention—in short, by acting on the future.





# GREEN ON WHEELS

## THE FUTURE OF THE AUTO

JONATHAN GOLOB

**It's hard to imagine a future for America without the auto. For an astonishing number of us, driving cars for every little task of life – carrying about two hundred pounds of human being in four thousand pounds of boxy steel, glass and aluminum – seems imperative, to the point of becoming a sacrosanct right in the American dream. Such a life cannot be made efficient. Each year of our fossil-fueled present consumes a half-millennium of long-buried, past photosynthesis. Our entire fossil-fueled civilization – of endlessly sprawling suburbs totally dependent upon the automobile – is unsustainable, in the literal sense of the word. “Unsustainable” is not synonymous with “undesirable.” Unsustainable means, sooner rather than later, this will come to an end.**

This is the reality: Our fossil-fueled present has no future. And there is another reality: The automobile cannot be improved or made more efficient in any significant way. We live with the myth that the car can still be a part of our green future, but a close look at how it is made and works shows that it is impractical to change from its current operating model to one that uses a cleaner source of energy. Soon we will have to accept the fact that it is not the car that must change but our use of it, and that means society itself must change.

To begin with, the typical car buzzing about today is pretty much a Ford Model A, sharing the basic plan laid out by the Model T—four pneumatic tires, axles, steering via the front wheels and a metal frame and body, all motivated by a liquid-fueled internal combustion engine run through a geared transmission. It's a good plan and pretty much impossible to exceed in overall efficiency.

For decades now, however, we've been telling ourselves that perfect machines of nearly limitless efficiency will soon replace the current fleet of gas-guzzling cars. We've been lying to ourselves, pretending that if we can just replace the fuel we place in the car, and the motor pushing the whole apparatus, we can remake the act of driving into something sustainable and environmentally sound. This is blatantly false.

The operating efficiency of a car is determined by two big factors: aerodynamic drag and weight. Moving a car through the air at highway speeds is akin to shoving your hand through a block of Jell-O. Narrow, smooth and long (a train) slips through the air with much more ease than the car's blunt, rough and short layout. Weight costs you with momentum. Remember Newton's laws: Objects at rest want to stay at rest; objects in motion want to stay in motion. It takes energy to start and stop and to go around curves. The heavier the car, the more energy it takes. The motor and fuel chosen does little to change any of this.

The huge efficiencies inherent to liquid fuels and internal combustion make the combo difficult to replace. A gallon of gasoline contains the energy of about 2,000 fully charged NiMH D-Batteries (like those used in the Prius). In other words, it takes 120 pounds of batteries to store the energy of six pounds of gas. And, as you use up the energy stored in your gas tank, it gets lighter; the batteries weigh the same charged or empty. Unlike the batteries that slowly discharge over time, the energy contained in the gas is stable. Storing and distributing hydrogen or transmitting electricity over huge distances are both nightmarishly more difficult problems than piping and trucking gasoline and diesel. Batteries, fuel cells and electric motors require far more exotic metals and toxic chemicals for their manufacture than a gas tank and an internal combustion engine. The problem with cars has little to do with gasoline and the internal combustion engine.

The future of the automobile will not be fleets of environmentally pure cars rolling down alabaster roads beneath a brilliant blue sky. If we fail to change how we live and work, the future of the automobile is the sooty air of present-day Beijing, of sweatshops filled with near-slave labor and of an Earth scoured with increasing desperation for fuel—by stealing food from the mouths of the world's hungry to create biofuels.

A sustainable future with the automobile would be of communities of trains, modest houses and spacious apartments vastly less dependent upon the car. It is a world of less disparity in material wealth, of less shipping of food and goods around the globe. The car has a place in such a world, as a source of leisure and pleasure, not a part of the daily grind. Households are becoming single car households again, after decades of expanding per-capita car ownership. It's nothing to fear; it's a step towards this sustainable future. We've been there before, and we're closer to such a society (on a global scale) than we've ever been before.



# GREEN/NOT GREEN

JONATHAN GOLOB & CHARLES MUDEDE

## Dishwashers are green; hand-washing dishes is not.

Purifying, delivering and heating water is a fantastically intensive process. A newer dishwasher, operated only when filled, uses vastly less hot water per dish than hand washing—one half the energy and one sixth the amount of water. Over the lifetime of a dishwasher, the difference can be fantastic.

## Eating seasonally is green; eating tomatoes in January is not.

Filling a grocery store with fresh fruit and vegetables year round means much that is eaten has traveled a greater distance than the consumer will ever travel him or herself. This mysterious travel that our food now takes means much of it carries a deep and long shadow of oil behind it.

## Cloth towels are green; paper towels are not.

Trees are our allies. Every year of their life, they trap and lock away carbon from the atmosphere. An acre planted with trees removes about a metric ton of carbon from the atmosphere per year. A paper towel (not made from 100% post-consumer recycled paper) necessitates the cutting down of trees for manufacture. The hit is double: One, as the towel degrades, it releases carbon into the atmosphere; two, the tree it came from no longer is absorbing carbon from the air.

## Walking to the store is green; driving is not.

It's the short trips – to the store, to the bank, to the school, to the theater – when driving's impact is ignored. Cars are at their least efficient when warming up; many of these trips are only a few miles long. A short walk rather than a short drive can have a dramatic change on your overall carbon impact. For too many of us, such a change will require a move to a more walkable community.

## Eating Kangaroo is green; eating cows is not.

Cattle produce a terrific amount of methane, a significant greenhouse gas. On the other hand, Kangaroos, which feed on the same type of grass as cows, do not produce methane. The reason for this is a particular bacteria that's found in the stomachs of kangaroos does something to the methane (it's not known exactly what) during the digestive process. True, we may one day be able to place this type of bacteria into the guts of cows, but until that happens, it's better for us eat kangaroo burgers than hamburgers. This recommendation is useful for those who live in Australia. Importing kangaroo meat to the US would, of course, defeat the purpose: reducing greenhouse gases.

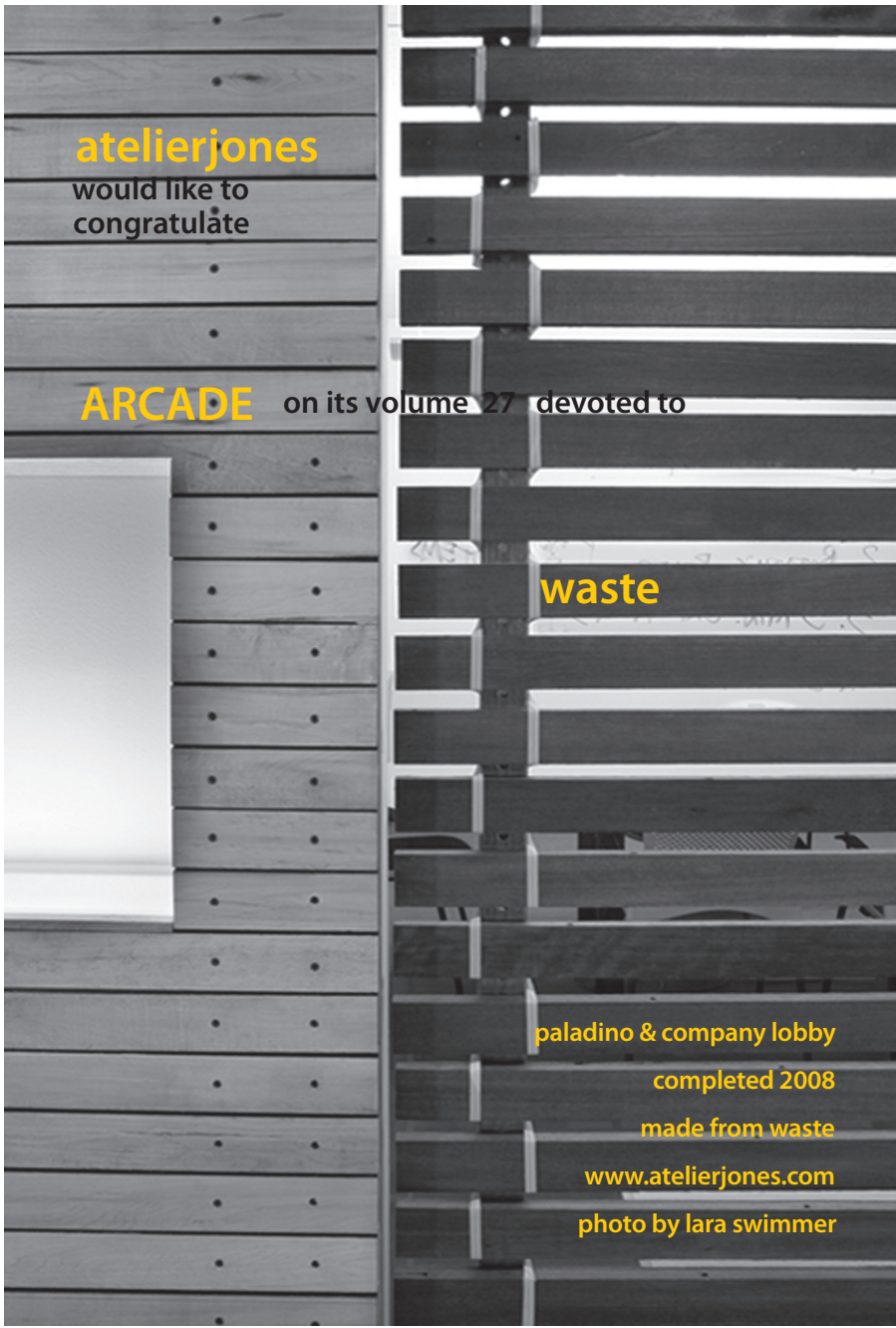
## Shared walls are green; detached walls are not.

Living with the wind as your neighbor is a complete disaster in terms of energy efficiency. Sharing surfaces is the thing to do. To be a better human being, we must seal the gaps, the empty spaces that separate us from other human beings. The more we have in common – walls, floors, ceilings – the more we improve resource conservation. An urban ethic that is scientifically valid: Attachment (being with others, or better yet, being close to others) is good; detachment (living apart or at a distance from others) is bad.

## Finally, and most importantly, friends are green; electronics are not.

How you spend your leisure time matters for the earth. Time spent with friends – drinking at a bar, playing games, listening to live music, dancing at a club, hiking on a trail – is green. Sitting at home, alone, entertained by electronics – watching TV, browsing the internet, playing video games – is costly. Electronic devices use a surprising amount of energy; delivering each YouTube video to your house releases dozens of grams of carbon into the atmosphere, as all the switches, data lines and your computer itself are powered.





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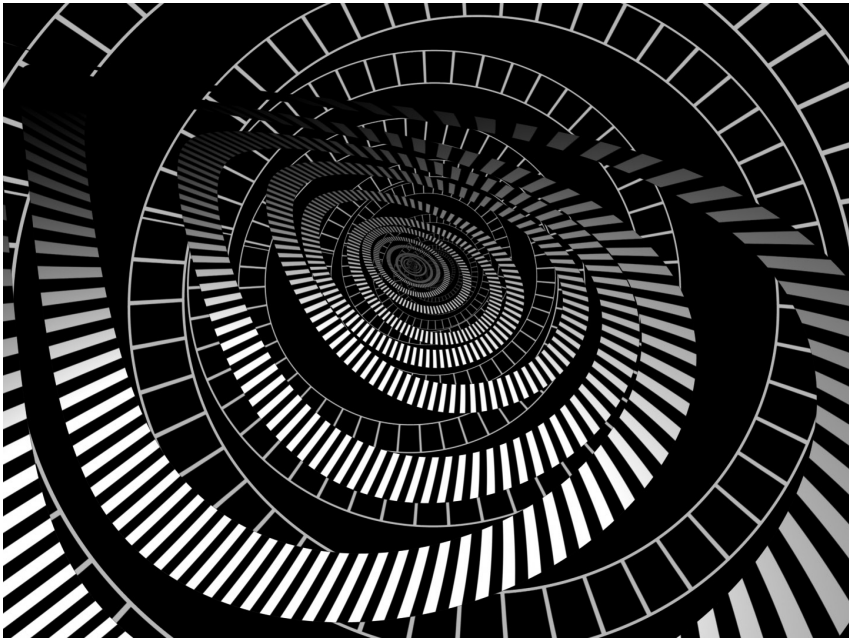
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Ann Lislegaard:2062 is organized by Henry Chief Curator Elizabeth Brown. The exhibition is generously supported by the Paul G. Allen Family Foundation, ArtsFund, the Mayor's Office of Arts & Cultural Affairs, the Danish Arts Council Committee for International Visual Art, the American-Scandinavian Foundation, and the Scan[Design by Inger & Jens Bruun Foundation. In-kind support is provided by Benjamin Moore and Hotel Max. Front Image: Ann Lislegaard. *The Left Hand of Darkness* (after Ursula K. Le Guin). 2008. Three-channel video installation. Courtesy of the artist and Murray Guy, New York.



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# REBRANDING BLUNDERS

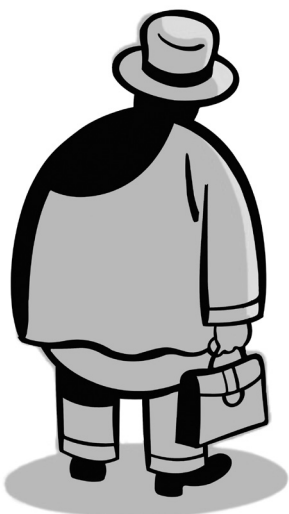
karen cheng and michael lindsay

There are only two good reasons to invest in a multi-million dollar rebranding: Either you’ve changed or you desperately need to change. For example, maybe your name is synonymous with evil (Philip Morris) or your logo is associated with the devil (Procter & Gamble). Perhaps you’ve just gotten married (Citigroup) or you’re about to be divorced (AOL). Maybe it’s just time for a face-lift—you feel tired, old-fashioned and out-of-date. In any case, proceed with caution. A new identity should clarify and refine your positioning; it should make it easier for people to understand exactly who you are and why that is valuable. Great brands (and great identities) must be distinct, memorable and genuine. They must simply and clearly communicate an authentic character that will resonate with a core audience.

Easy to describe, but of course, difficult to do well.

OLD	NEW	
		<p><b>BLIMPIE</b> AN UTTERLY USELESS REDESIGN. A NAME LIKE “BLIMPIE” DEMANDS A ROUNDED, CUTE AND PLAYFUL CONCEPT. IF THEY KEEP THIS TYPE TREATMENT, THEY SHOULD CHANGE THEIR NAME TO “BLOCKS” INSTEAD.</p>
		<p><b>KRAFT</b> FROM THE COMPANY: “PEOPLE AROUND THE WORLD WILL BEGIN TO SEE THE NEW IDENTITY THAT DELICIOUSLY FEATURES A SMILE, THE NATURAL REACTION TO DELICIOUS FOODS AND EXPERIENCES, AND A COLORFUL FLAVOR BURST.” BUT WHAT WAS WRONG WITH THE ORIGINAL KRAFT LOGO? IT WAS CLEAR, RECOGNIZABLE, SIMPLE AND HAD THE EQUITY OF OVER 40 YEARS OF CONTINUOUS USE.</p>
		<p><b>JACK IN THE BOX</b> NOW MORE UPSCALE, BUT THE NEW PERSONALITY DOESN'T QUITE MATCH THE QUIRKY ATTITUDE OF THE JACK TV ADVERTISING. MUST ALL NEW LOGOS BE SIMULATED DIMENSIONAL VOLUMES? THE VISUAL DISCONNECT OF JACK BEING “ON” THE BOX IS A BIT FRUSTRATING.</p>
		<p><b>PEPSI</b> FROM THE COMPANY: “THE BRAND'S BLUE AND RED GLOBE TRADEMARK WILL BECOME A SERIES OF “SMILES,” WITH THE CENTRAL WHITE BAND ARCING AT DIFFERENT ANGLES DEPENDING ON THE PRODUCT.” AN INTERESTING CONCEPT BUT LACKS A GREAT DEAL OF FINESSE IN EXECUTION. UNFORTUNATELY, IT LOOKS LIKE A VIEW OF (AHEM) LOW-RISE JEANS. OH WELL, AFTER ALL, PEPSI IS A DRINK THAT MAY CONTRIBUTE TO OBESITY.</p>
		<p><b>WALMART</b> A GENERIC REDESIGN FROM A GIANT, MORALLY CHALLENGED, MULTI-BILLION DOLLAR CORPORATION IN A SUPERFICIAL ATTEMPT TO “SOFTEN THEIR IMAGE.” FROM WALMART SPOKESMAN KEVIN GARDNER: “THIS LOGO UPDATE IS SIMPLY A REFLECTION OF THE REFRESHED IMAGE OF OUR STORES AND OUR RENEWED SENSE OF PURPOSE OF HELPING PEOPLE SAVE MONEY SO THEY CAN LIVE BETTER.”</p>
		<p><b>DAIRY QUEEN</b> FROM THE COMPANY: “THE TRADITIONAL LOGO IS THE FOUNDATION FOR THE NEW ONE. A MORE SYMMETRICAL ELLIPSE ENHANCED WITH GOLD AND BLUE CURVED SWISHES SIGNIFYING FOOD AND TREATS.” HOW DO ABSTRACT SWOOSHES COMMUNICATE FOOD AND TREATS? IT'S JUST BAD ORNAMENTATION TO THE EXISTING LOGO.</p>





# ONE KRAZY WORLD

erin kendig

**KRAZY! THE DELIRIOUS WORLD OF ANIME + COMICS + VIDEO GAMES + ART**  
 EDITED BY BRUCE GRENVILLE  
 BRUCE GRENVILLE WITH TIM JOHNSON, KIYOSHI KUSUMI, SETH,  
 ART SPIEGELMAN, TOSHIYA UENO AND WILL WRIGHT  
 DOUGLAS & MCINTYRE, THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS  
 AND THE VANCOUVER ART GALLERY, 2008  
 272 PAGES

From the moment I met the Graphic Novel, I was taken—perhaps by the dramatic compositions, economy of form, the skill displayed in rendering people, movement, place, the direct statements made through a dynamic symbolic language. As someone interested in communication, all this I desired for my own visual articulations. And since my first meeting with this world of graphic expression, I've fallen in love – madly, pathetically in love – with the idea that pictures and words can work together to tell stories, express concepts, yearnings, memories in a way that other forms can't.

Last May through September, the Vancouver Art Gallery in British Columbia hosted *Krazy! The Delirious World of Anime + Comics + Video Games + Art*, an exhibition providing comprehensive insight into pop visual culture. Conceived and developed by Vancouver Art Gallery's Bruce Grenville, each section of the exhibition was co-curated by a visionary or expert in a particular media. Taking its cue from George Herriman's iconic *Krazy Kat* comics of the early 20th century and the slippery, enigmatic, deeply-connected relationships between his three main characters – mouse, cat, dog – the exhibition and its accompanying book draw together disparate yet interrelated forms, exploring their pasts and potential futures as one cultural force. The book, a bold, bright presentation of the show, provides ample images – including panels, stills and sketches – paired with conversational essays elucidating the inner workings of each piece (70 in all).

In sum, the essays in *Krazy!* illuminate the unique art (or cultural) historical import of each work, how each functions formally, why each is what we can proudly call “art.” It is fascinating and satisfying to read essays that treat these forms of expression with the weight of both serious analysis and passionate appreciation. When Art Spiegelman and Seth eloquently wax on the ability of comics to stretch time and space, to build complex worlds, to exalt the mundane in broad expressionist strokes, to poignantly grasp, distil and transform memory, I'm moved. When Tim Johnson points out the emotional acting successes of animated creatures, I believe in movie magic again. When Will Wright enthusiastically expounds upon the intricate

design within certain video games – all masterfully devised to produce a very specific user experience, a story the user is part of – I suddenly don't care (almost) about all those times I got ditched for *World of Warcraft*. When Kiyoshi Kusumi and Toshiya Ueno share thoughts on two popular art/narrative forms in their culture, anime and manga, I feel slightly sad; I know that even as I enjoy the magnificent phantasmagoria or anachronistic futurism found in many of these works, as with the ingestion of any foreign media, points are missed, hidden within a palimpsest of cultural memory, allusion, time. And as a very, very humble but aspiring artist, Bruce Grenville's selection of and commentary on visual art is inspiring: It is exciting to see how artists appropriate the styles and forms of these media to create a new commentary and expression within the gallery setting.

And as a student of visual communication, what strikes me most about the highlighted works is the attention to design within each: how each is an act of purposeful creation geared towards both expression and function, how each strives to speak clearly and urgently though image with an attention to elaborately built (if abstractly, in the imagination) environments. In essence, these forms from pop culture are filled with that which designers live and breathe.

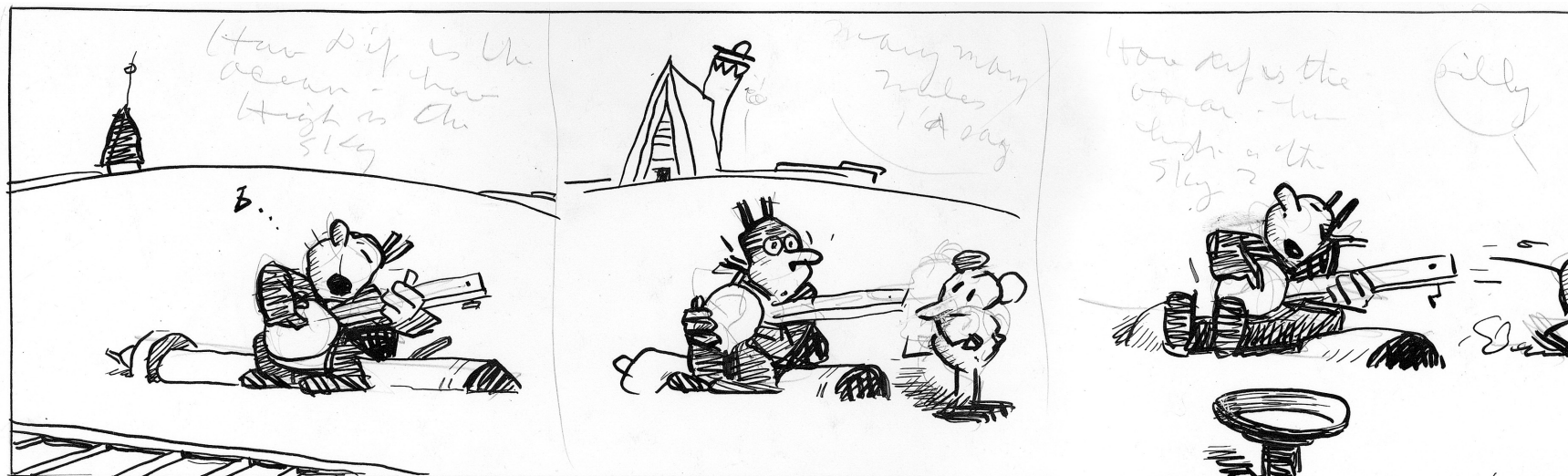
And these forms, already pervasive on a certain level, are only going to become more prevalent (or recognized) as serious modes of visual communication, narration and expression in the future; the up-and-coming generation of professionals is very comfortable with these forms because, well, they grew up on them: comics, after school cartoons, video games and the like. Just last January Seattle's Frye Art Museum ran an exhibition of Underground Comics legend R. Crumb's work in all its gritty reality; this spring the museum presented a series of four animations by Berlin-based animator Nathalie Djurberg. Individuals have been creating important works in the various fields of pop visual culture for some time, and we are becoming increasingly open to and appreciative of the potential of these artists and their chosen forms.

And this is a blessing. The more modes we have available to us for communication and expression, the better off we are as a society. Every media, on a very basic, formal level, has its inherent strengths. For example, some narratives manifest well in a novel but translate poorly to film, while some stories are better seen on screen than read. This logic extends to graphic novels, comics, animation and even video games. As art forms, all have the potential to explore weighty topics in very specific, unique ways we are only beginning to fully realize.

Already, I'd claim, the graphic novel has asserted itself as the best vehicle for memoir. Read *Epileptic* by David B., *Persepolis*, by Marjane Satrapi or any of the graphic memoirs featured in *Krazy!*. Read them and just try to tell me you disagree.

It's one crazy world we live in. And that is exciting.

ERIN KENDIG IS THE PUBLISHING COORDINATOR AT ARCADE.



TOP: SETH, GEORGE SPROTT (1894–1975)—CHAPTER 20 [DETAIL] PUBLISHED IN THE NEW YORK TIMES MAGAZINE, FEBRUARY 19, 2007. IMAGE COURTESY OF DRAWN AND QUARTERLY. ABOVE: GEORGE HERRIMAN, *KRAZY KAT* [PRELIMINARY DRAWING], 1944, INK AND PENCIL ON BRISTOL BOARD, COLLECTION OF TIM SAMUELSON AND CHRIS WARE, IMAGE COURTESY OF CHRIS WARE, © 2008 KING FEATURES SYNDICATE, INC.™ HEARST HOLDINGS, INC. OPPOSITE: NICK PARK, *THE WRONG TROUSERS* [FILM STILL], AARDMAN ANIMATIONS, 1993 DVD 30 MINUTES, © 2007 AARDMAN ANIMATIONS LTD.





## Featured in *Krazy!*:

### COMICS / CO-CURATED BY SETH AND ART SPIEGELMAN

Lynda Barry, *One Hundred Demons* (2000-2002): "As readers we are aware of the sad disparity between her characters' sensitive inner selves and their inability to communicate this to the harsh world around them...There's something about the way she constructs her comic pages that reminds one of an architectural dollhouse built to contain a memory."

### "GRAPHIC NOVELS" / CO-CURATED BY SETH AND ART SPIEGELMAN

Allison Bechdel, *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* (2006): "Not to imply that earlier comics weren't great art, but the fact that a book like Bechdel's, so literary in content, could be so widely accepted – and not simply because of its cartoonish qualities or ironic stance – shows that the goals of cartoonists have changed dramatically."

### ANIMATED CARTOONS / CURATED BY TIM JOHNSON

Nick Park, *The Wrong Trousers*, Aardman Animations (1993): "I always feel that the problem with cel animation is that it's so 'untactile'...you don't feel as though you can touch the characters or shake their hands...the clay animation used in *The Wrong Trousers* has that in spades. Not only do you feel as if you could reach out and touch the characters, immerse yourself in their world, but you are also hyperaware that somebody has touched them in order to make them exist."

### VIDEO GAMES / CURATED BY WILL WRIGHT

Toru Iwatani, *Pac-Man*, NAMCO/BANDAI (1980): "Although Pac-Man may have appeared foreign to most people, there are little aspects of it that are drawn from familiar experiences, such as playing tag or mowing the grass. These snippets of everyday life come together to make Pac-Man incredibly immersive and easy to understand..."

### MANGA / CURATED BY KIYOSHI KUSUMI AND TOSHIYA UENO

Taiyo Matsumoto, *Black & White* (1993-1994): "...*Black & White* can be interpreted as a fable about two solitary individuals that complement each other like yin and yang. The intense companionship the boys experience is depicted without egocentrism or homoeroticism and with none of the Batman-and-Joker contrast of good and evil, but rather in the style of cosmic Taoism connecting micro and macro."

### ANIME / CURATED BY TOSHIYA UENO AND KIYOSHI KUSUMI

Katsuhiro Otomo, *Akira*, Akira Committee (1988): "From the recurrent and devastating fires of the Edo period to the destructive forces of gentrification that drove Japan's bubble economy of the 1980s, the spectacle of Tokyo's destruction has fascinated its citizens and the world at large...*Akira* offers one of the most memorable images of a ruined Tokyo."

### VISUAL ART / CURATED BY BRUCE GRENVILLE

Chiho Aoshima, *City Glow* (2005): "*City Glow* is a phantasmagoric presence: a shifting landscape of uncanny figures, luminescent buildings and abundant vegetation in a world driven by impulses that seem incomprehensible, or at least unfamiliar."

For a complete list of works included in the exhibition, visit: [http://www.vanartgallery.bc.ca/the\\_exhibitions/exhibit\\_krazy.html](http://www.vanartgallery.bc.ca/the_exhibitions/exhibit_krazy.html).



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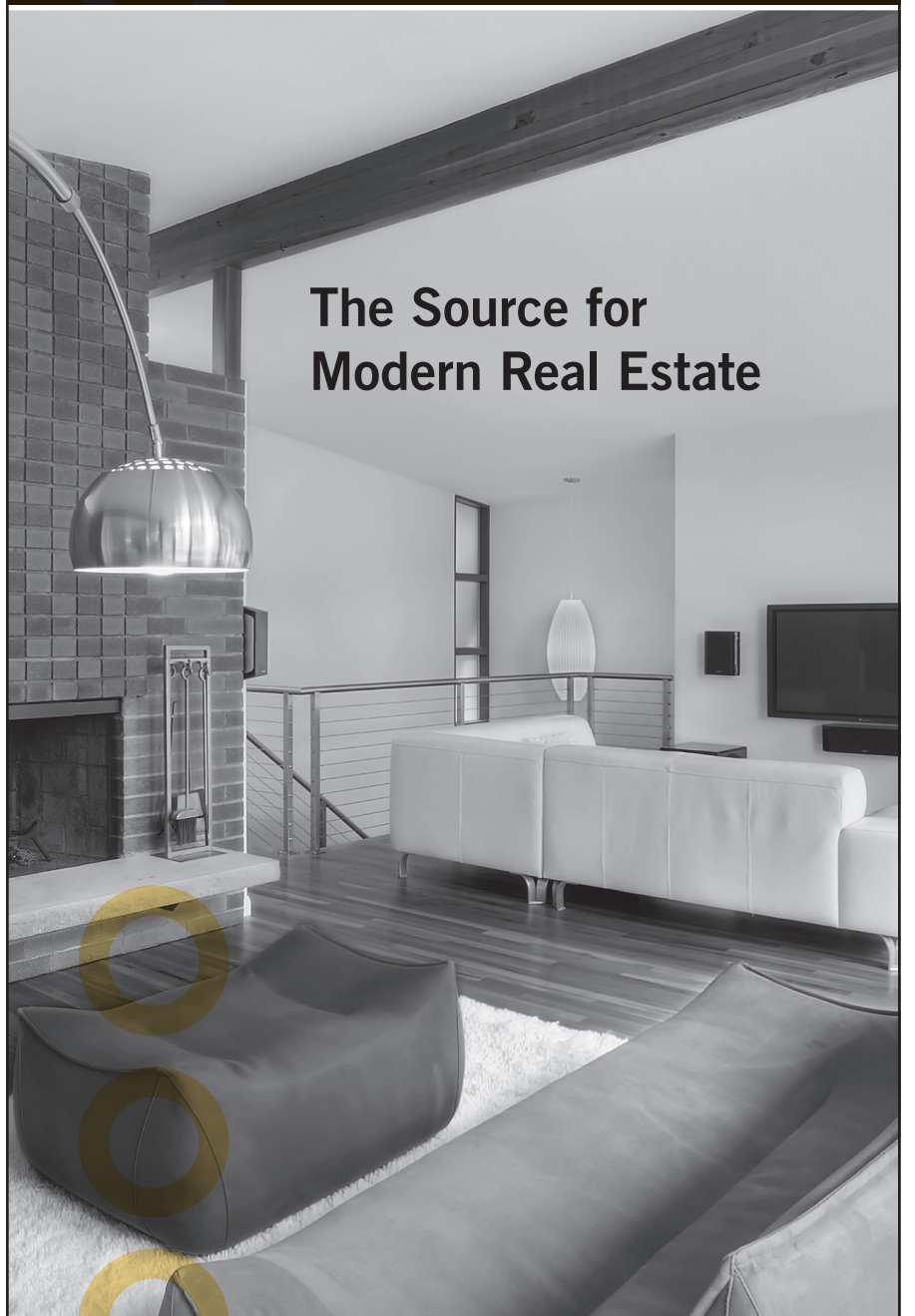
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# REDIRECTING THE WORLD

jm cava

**DESIGN FUTURING: SUSTAINABILITY,  
ETHICS AND NEW PRACTICE**  
TONY FRY  
BERG 2009  
\$29.95

**"DESIGNERS DESIGN, BUT HOW THEY ARE THEMSELVES  
DESIGNED, AND WHAT IS DESIGNED BY THE DESIGNING  
OF WHAT THEY DESIGN IS RARELY RECOGNIZED OR  
UNDERSTOOD."**

These days, you can't throw a rock without hitting something, or someone, labeling itself "sustainable" or "green." Corporations that a few years back thought of environmentalists as social misfits chaining themselves to trees now tout green-ness in unnecessary consumables, sold to us with extravagant advertising campaigns and colorful graphics depicting various forms of a grateful and happy planet earth. This kind of approach to sustainability is entirely counterproductive, says Tony Fry – author, practitioner and sustainability guru – in his recent book, *Design Futuring*. For even as individual products become environmentally safer, the increased marketing, production and sales necessary to maintain continuous economic expansion effects a net gain in overall un-sustainability, as far as survival of the planet is concerned.

**"THERE IS NO FUTURE IN BUYING INTO THE 'GREEN  
CAPITALIST' POSITION THAT CLAIMS THAT 'WE CAN  
HAVE IT ALL' AS LONG AS 'WE GO GREEN.'"**

This deadly combination of short-sightedness – not understanding that "everything designed goes on designing" – and a skewed anthropocentric view of our place in the world's ecology places us firmly on the road to what Fry calls (with an earlier book so titled) *Defuturing*. This path, as dismal as it sounds, irrevocably reduces the future of every species. Fry maintains that the antidote to such self-destruction requires nothing less than a complete paradigm shift in terms of how we see the nature of design, not just as it pertains to objects, buildings and the environment, but design as a proactive set of decisions encompassing every choice we make as thinking humans, individually and collectively. This shift is the essence of *Design Futuring*, and to participate in it is not for the uncommitted. Forget about using recycled toilet paper and dragging your bottles to the curb; think more along the lines of completely transforming the workings of corporate capitalism and the nature of democracy—try that out on your local CEO and state senator. Nevertheless, Fry's far-reaching cultural insights combined with proposed solutions, both thoughtful and practical, create a book that presents what is without question the most profound and intelligent thinking on sustainability today.

**Fry's far-reaching cultural insights combined with proposed solutions, both thoughtful and practical, create a book that presents what is without question the most profound and intelligent thinking on sustainability today.**

**"...DEMOCRACY AS WE KNOW IT CANNOT DELIVER  
SUSTAIN-ABILITY... SUCH THINGS JUST CANNOT HAPPEN  
IN A SYSTEM IN WHICH THE POLITICAL OPTIONS PUT TO  
'THE PEOPLE' ARE DETERMINED BY THE DICTATES OF  
'CONSUMER SOVEREIGNTY.'"**

The only stumbling block for simple readers like myself is that Fry comes from a postmodern philosophical background, and fragments of this sometimes bulky luggage can slow things down a bit. However, unlike many academics who flirted with the French intellectual beasts of the 80s, Fry never swallowed the likes of Derrida or Bataille whole. He's carefully used their thoughts about reframing to inform his thinking as, over many years of scholarship, he has slowly turned his sights away from a history of art/architecture/culture towards that of a critical sustainability, which he renames *Sustainment*. This not only separates his radical ideas from those of the mainstream, which he claims will go nowhere, but is an indication of how the language he uses can be somewhat convoluted (and a reflection of his postmodern academic background). It contrasts but doesn't really get in the way of what the writing defines: clear outlines of ideas both pragmatic and ideological.

**"...WE HUMAN BEINGS LIVE A CONTRADICTION. IN OUR  
ENDEAVOUR TO SUSTAIN OURSELVES IN THE SHORT  
TERM WE COLLECTIVELY ACT IN DESTRUCTIVE WAYS  
TOWARDS THE VERY THINGS WE AND ALL OTHER BEINGS  
FUNDAMENTALLY DEPEND UPON. SUCH LONGSTANDING  
AND STILL GROWING 'DEFUTURING' NEEDS HALTING  
AND COUNTERING."**

If you're a designer interested in sustainability beyond the robotic LEED™ approach (better than nothing, but, as Fry points out, equivalent to applying a band-aid when major surgery is in order), then at least one other book of Fry's many books is worth reading: *A New Design Philosophy: An Introduction to Defuturing* (1999). There he implicates – with well-documented research – several modern cultural and design deities in the short-sighted behavior of seeding and fertilizing *Defuturing*, allowing it to blossom as a cultural virus throughout the world. Among the tarnished icons are Gropius and the Bauhaus; the 1939 World's Fair with its corporate "streamline" designers Loewy, Teague and Geddes; the notion of Western utopias; and the insidious and pernicious influence of television. Underlying all this is an important critique of designers—their educational and value systems and their participation in the design(er)-as-celebrity-object trend promoted by the media. Subscribing for the most part only to an "instrumentalist techno-fix" attitude to sustainability, their solutions are typically short-term and ultimately unworkable, conceived as they are within the framework of the system that created the problem (remind you of any recent financial news?).

**"THE POPULAR MEDIA'S CHARACTERIZATION OF DESIGN  
SELDOM GOES BEYOND STYLE OR CRASS WAYS OF  
EMBELLISHING HYPED TECHNOLOGY...[REINFORCING]  
PERCEPTIONS OF A DESIGNER AS A CREATIVE CAPITALIST  
NERD DELIVERING 'SEXY LOOKING THINGS'... KEEPING  
THE PUBLIC ILL INFORMED, AND SO ILL EQUIPPED TO MAKE  
DESIGN DECISIONS IN THEIR DAILY LIVES."**

**"DESIGNERS MOSTLY LACK THE ABILITY TO TALK ABOUT  
DESIGN IN INFORMED, CRITICAL WAYS, THEY MOSTLY  
ARTICULATE WHAT THEY DO IN BANALITIES, AND ABOVE  
ALL, HAVE A VERY LIMITED UNDERSTANDING OF THE  
CONSEQUENCES OF WHAT THEY CREATE."**

There are too many good ideas and observations in this book – practical as well as theoretical – to list them all, but here is an example of Fry sending a message to architects and planners, turning the sustainable world on its head by weighing the particular use of a building much higher than its use of low VOC paint or carpet. Fry's long experience with this subject gives him the skill to calibrate a blend of high philosophy and level-headedness that keep his bold redefinitions of design and sustainability solidly grounded in the life-world.

**"THE KEY FACTOR IS WHAT A BUILDING IS USED FOR. IF  
OCCUPIED BY AN ORGANIZATION USING IT TO EXTEND  
THE UNSUSTAINABLE BY ITS PRODUCTIVE, INSTITUTIONAL  
OR COMMERCIAL ACTIVITIES, THEN THE SUSTAINING  
CONTRIBUTION IS NEGATED—IN THIS SITUATION THE  
BUILDING, DESPITE ITS ENVIRONMENTAL PERFORMANCE,  
SUSTAINS THE UNSUSTAINABLE."**

This is one of the only works on sustainability that steps back and takes a broader view of what has become a confusing topic, since its nomenclature has been co-opted to sell everything from pet food to jet engines. In three books over 15 years, Tony Fry has examined, questioned and even lived these ideas from both a philosophical and an architectural/business viewpoint; *Design Futuring* is the clearest and best-written of the three, comfortably including Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty alongside down-to-earth suggestions for simple and immediate steps towards the transformation of a design practice. That places this book on the essential reading list for everyone involved in the myriad disciplines of design: creators, fabricators, teachers, students, developers, politicians or writers—come to think of it, just about anyone. For as Tony Fry suggests, every human, prefigured act is in fact a design, and everyone benefits or suffers from the character of those acts.

**"MOST OF US GREW UP THINKING THAT TIME WAS  
ENDLESS. INCREASINGLY MORE OF US ARE FINDING OUT  
THAT THIS IS NOT THE CASE. THE FUTURE IS NOW  
SOMETHING THAT WE HAVE TO MAKE TOGETHER...WE  
ARE NOW IN TIME'S ENDGAME—AND SUBJECT TO  
OUR ACTION IT COULD BE SHORT OR LONG."**



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# A New ALCHEMY

**VOLUME 28 of *ARCADE*** will use the four basic elements of the universe — earth, air, fire and water — as a lens through which to investigate design in an age of progressing climate change. We need to reconsider ordinary things in new ways. We need new rules for a new reality. We need to reset our thinking. We need to reset the system.

“I feel a mixture of hope and eagerness. Hope, because I have become aware of a profession, a force really, that could indeed make a difference...They could make a difference everywhere and in practically every area of public concern—health, education, criminal justice, environment, and family life as well as in fostering democracy, creativity, community, and affection. What is this profession, this force? It is a collection of professions, really, all combined under the rubric of design.”

Richard Farson, *The Power of Design: A Force for Transforming Everything*



# THE PROMISE OF RECESSION

barry katz

For the greater part of human history, coins, bricks and printed pages were the only products produced with perfect regularity. As a rule, an object that was too perfectly formed, that bore too close a resemblance to the one that came before and the one that came after, or that did not reveal the hand of its maker, was regarded as suspect—even diabolical.

Toward the end of the 18th century, in an abrupt and fateful afterthought to the human record, we began to move from the singular creations of the pre-industrial era toward the almost universal practice of mass-production. Today the imperatives of engineering, law and global marketing have extended the requirement of absolute standardization to practically everything we produce and consume.

This was the situation that moved William Morris to action. In his single-minded protest against industrial civilization, Morris advocated a set of principles – the unity of the fine and the applied arts, simplicity of form, propriety of ornament, the honest use of materials – that might form the basis of an authentic, modern design. But his campaign took him even further. Almost alone among his contemporaries, Morris dared to inquire into “How We live, and How We Might Live;” to denounce the class prejudice that separated the fine arts from “The Lesser Arts;” to listen in the rhythms of the nature and cadence of history for “News from Nowhere.” Morris died in 1896, feeling utterly defeated. Although his ideas were the product of Victorian moralism, utopian socialism and medievalizing romanticism, his demand for sustainable design is timelier than ever before.

The current recession, although it has devastated the lives of millions worldwide, offers a glimmer of hope. As production and consumption join hands in a breathtaking spiral of decline, we can catch a glimpse of what design might look like in a world that does not operate at an ecological deficit, a world in which every act of production and consumption stabilizes, or even adds to our collective natural assets.

The most obvious characteristic of design in a restorative world is that there will be less of it. A lot less of it. There will be less time, less money, less energy and less creative genius spent turning the earth into a ravaged, crowded, burnt-out cinder. The design professions will be decimated (literally, “reduced by a power of ten”), at least as we know them today.

In an age threatened by hyper-consumption (acquisition that stimulates desire rather than fulfills it), the forced unemployment of just two product designers would have great ramifications. No product means no product to package, and that minor calamity finishes off a struggling firm of graphic designers, who take with them a mid-size advertising agency and its retinue of hired hands. Unemployed tenants do not pay rent and that tips their overextended landlord-developer into the red and results in the cancellation of three planned mini-malls and a luxury condominium. The specter of a few dozen shell-shocked architects loitering around the cafeterias of design schools, offering to teach for food, causes three Midwestern art academies to close their doors.

Membership renewal notices go unheeded, causing the IDSA, the AIGA and the AIA to issue final appeals and then quietly fold up their tents. No more travelling exhibitions. No more sumptuous coffee table annuals. No more mass-mailings on luscious, creamy paper inviting members to attend gala events in distant cities to discuss environmentally sensitive design. Phone messages are left unanswered, e-mails unreturned, websites unsurfed.

All this means fewer products, fewer resources expended on making things and fewer designers engaged in conceiving and planning them. Fewer products to sell means fewer advertisements, which means less paper and more trees, less air time and more air. Suddenly there is less chemical pollution of the biosphere and less visual pollution of the semiosphere. People feel less assaulted by the relentless barrage of things and images and become more attentive to the spaces between them, which they will begin to call “nature.”

The fewer things there are, the fewer things people find that they actually want. “Need” and “desire” begin to be disentangled. Once the siege of commercial advertising is lifted, quiet, stillness and empty space will be craved with the same intensity directed toward snowmobiles and home entertainment centers today. Glassy-eyed drivers will stop drifting along the freeways in hybrid cars with ergonomically-designed dashboards looking for something to buy. The leaf-blowers will fall eerily silent.

But what of the legions of unemployed designers? Happily, in a truly restorative world there would also be more design. A lot more of it. But design of a different sort, practiced by a new breed of designer according to principles now only dimly perceived.

The first new design specialty to blossom will be *un-design*. Under the guidance of trained and dedicated professionals, un-design students will study methods of fabrication but starting from the back end of the textbook. Forget Derrida. They will practice applied deconstruction.

During their summer recesses, they will intern with un-design studios and gain practical experience excavating junkyards, strip-mining department store shelves and clear-cutting rooftop satellite dishes. Upon graduation they will hang out their shingles and begin practicing un-design for an array of corporate and municipal clients: Architects will be put to work un-designing dilapidated, underutilized and just plain ugly buildings; Graphic un-designers will set out to neutralize billboards, web pages and corporate identity systems; Industrial un-designers will start by dismantling handguns and cigarette machines and move on to assault rifles and SUVs. They will have more work than they can handle.

As legions of un-designers gradually clear away the appalling detritus of the Design Century, a guild of *immaterialists* will emerge who specialize in “mining urban industries,” in the phrase of the Worldwatch Institute, transforming industrial waste into a new generation of building and manufacturing materials: Used tires will be more sought-after than virgin timber, empty soft-drink bottles and salvaged copper wire more valuable than oil wells. Just as the raw engineering of the first industrial age had to be softened by the designer’s touch, so the processed materials of the post-industrial age will cease to look like used egg cartons and become shimmering, sensuous and superb.

Once the immaterialists have done their work, a new breed of *post-designers* will step in and begin the arduous but playful task, conceived a century ago by William Morris, of “redesigning the world.” Some will practice “design-for-disassembly,” creating products that can be put together, taken apart, repaired and customized by mere mortals. Others will work toward an ecology of information, thinning the festering datamass and rehabilitating the printed page.

In every case, post-designers will adhere to basic principles of ecology as if they were laws of nature (which, as it turns out, they are): the sustainable use of natural resources, so that at the end of its useful life every product gracefully morphs into something new; the elimination of residual waste, whether of materials or of energy; the creative synthesis of regionalism and globalism, and of the high-tech and the hand-made; the sharing of ideas, information, architectural space and computer time because we are all in this together. These principles will be codified into a few basic and utterly non-negotiable commandments:

- Post-designers will worry not just about the costs of failure but the costs of success.
- Post-designers will create products that clean up after themselves.
- Post-designers will solve the problem they are assigned and then one more, *pro bono publico*.
- Post-designers will practice advocacy, turning their clients into *post-clients* and the users of their products into *post-users*.
- Post-designers will practice design for life, not lifestyle; they will design as if their lives – and not just their livelihoods – depend on it.

The world will once again be ablaze with activity but of a restorative, renewable, sustainable character. The ranks of the post-designers will swell. Post-design schools will reopen. The *post-professional societies* will be reborn.

It has been only 200 years since the instinct of acquisitive individualism became linked to a market economy and an industrial technology – about 1/10,000th of the career of humans on the earth – and the prognosis is not good. It took nearly a century, and the idiosyncratic genius of William Morris, to perceive the extent to which design was part of the problem and might yet be part of the solution, and still another for this insight to enter into our own collective consciousness. We are now at a perilous juncture: Nobody knows how long it will take to clean up the mess we have made, and nobody knows how much time we have left to do it.

The recession may be a blessing in hideous disguise.

THIS ESSAY REINTERPRETS SOME OF THE AUTHOR’S SPECULATIONS FIRST PUBLISHED IN METROPOLIS A DECADE AGO. BARRY KATZ IS PROFESSOR OF HUMANITIES AND DESIGN AT THE CALIFORNIA COLLEGE OF ARTS, SAN FRANCISCO AND CONSULTING PROFESSOR OF DESIGN AT STANFORD UNIVERSITY.





The most obvious characteristic of design in a restorative world is that there will be less of it. A lot less of it. There will be less time, less money, less energy and less creative genius spent turning the earth into a ravaged, crowded, burnt-out cinder. The design professions will be decimated (literally, “reduced by a power of ten”), at least as we know them today.



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For additional information contact  
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