

Peter Fend

Peter Fend: I'd like to address the generally circulated views about what I'm up to. I have to be as simple as I can for what I might call a corrective interview. Corrective always to try if possible to give the public figure a chance.

Philip Pocock: Wouldn't that put you on the defensive? You remember General De Gaulle: "Never apologize. Never explain."

PF: Well, we're not trying to?

PP: Okay let's try. First, you have a reputation of being an enfant terrible. Some powers see you as the 'bad boy' of contemporary art, stirring up rumors and causing trouble.

PF: Yes. Well, I should say that crimes that have been committed, any crimes, to cause me to take the actions that I've taken, have not been made by me, committed by me but rather by various state organs and state agencies.

PP: Your company's name is?

PF: Ocean Earth Construction and Development Corporation.

PP: *No irony intended with OECD?*

PF: No, that was quite by accident. Or I should say by a certain kind of necessity in the sense that we had initially a name, but New York State had that name already in the register so we adjusted the name and it was done by this lawyer who is not fully conscious of adjustment and, voila, we had a name that wasn't unique. We thought then let's just let it continue.

PP: *Now do the ventures that you're involved in put you in any danger?*

PF: Sure there's danger. A lot of danger.

PP: *Has your life been threatened?*

PF: A lawyer who has quite a bit of contact in the art world and a writer for the *Village Voice* who knows how things work have both said that this is very dangerous, and there was a sort of standard spy game going on that in terms of seducing and getting involved in domestic life in a domestic residence of one of my girlfriends and, you know, making it quite, shall we say, arranging so to say if I were ever to have a meeting with that person it would be inside that house, which would not be a very smart thing to do. And the person onto me would have already written a sort of biography about me which would not be very nice.

PP: *You must already have a dossier in covert agencies.*

PF: Of course, sure. But I'm not really operating in that frame. Maybe I should get to the real program. We have here a book, *The History of Technology*, and we understand that there are real technological needs today. Very acutely there is a need for a change in the fuel base. We understand from scientists that sixty percent of the fossil fuel emissions need to be eliminated and pretty much right away. Now, that is what the doctor tells the patient. The patient, however, even after a huge conference in Rio de Janeiro about the world environment and about the patient's health, knowing that it's really bad, decides to do nothing. Here you have a doctor telling the patient what to do and the patient, the world society, is unable to act and, yes, I feel it is necessary to act.

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the fuel base.*

PP: *Aren't the third world nations, emerging nations like India, using such occasions to barter economic aid for environmental responsibility? The real issue there wasn't the environment but the leverage of the environment for economic gain. Supposedly some third world powers attempted to use the environment as a weapon. India reported that the car population there would soon explode and emissions alone in India would disrupt and destroy life on this planet unless western powers don't provide the aid necessary for responsible growth.*

PF: Yes. Well, let me just put out my line of reasoning here. My point is that as someone who wants to have children, live and live well, and as someone who comes from a post-war generation as opposed to a pre-war genera-

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tion, I'm aware that I certainly have to make my world and they make their world and unfortunately they have a lot of power right now. They still have their property arrangements, which are mostly in the ground, i.e. oil fields, and there can be a lot of mouthing about the need to change the fuel base, but there has been very little action. There are all these assets held by existing major oil companies and so on. So there is a necessity, unfortunately, of making some real change, which will, I'm afraid to say, like any kind of historical activity involve a certain amount of cutting through of tissues, so to speak.

PP: Well, now you get to the problem of how?

PF: My whole career is genuinely and fundamentally to figure out how. You might call that an art career in terms of art as manner or way.

PP: Do you think it's possible with art?

*PF: Well, when I say the word manner or way as opposed to *Kunst* which implies something ultimate, or very refined., I'm not really one who makes anything refined. Rather I'm one who tries to push forth an idea and present an image or a kind of psychological event to the public. Here is a big pile of dirt. That is a country that should be independent.*

PP: Everybody knows what you say to be true and this has to be done. It's not new that fossil fuels are killing us.

PF: Right.

PP: In fact we are really aware of that. What is it that's stopping people from doing the obvious thing?

PF: Existing property arrangements which in effect means existing concepts of wealth. And art helps to identify new concepts of wealth. That's why I say art.

Take the Renaissance. During the renaissance there was a whole idea of pictorial space, of, say, a gliding machine, drive shafts, and the Renaissance studies of perspective were directly tied in with the formation of the new technologies. The camera, the drive shaft, all that comes from Renaissance drawing. And what recently we've had in art in the form of earthworks, things like Walter de Maria's *Lightening Field*, performances that sort of suggest the new paradigms in material organization, like Joseph Beuys's *Fat Corner* pieces, drawings by people like, Sol LeWitt, videos by Keith Sonnier, all of which normal industrial technology. If you were to have lightening fields everywhere around the landscape, it would obviously mean a very fundamental change in the use of land, the building and design of cities, in the notion of what to do with materials. The identification of the marsh as a valuable thing by people like Robert Smithson would entail very directly a greatly different approach to things like marsh clearing, marsh drainage.

PP: I've read about this a little but could you explain to me the importance of the marsh in your project?

PF: Well, actually it's a very standard scien-

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tific view. They're called wetlands. Any ecological organization, anybody from the Green Party, anybody who is an environment minister in any country will applaud and honor the notion of wetlands preservation and the restoration of marshes.

PP: What do they do?

PF: Well they serve as the fertility zones of any given ecological region. That is to say it is there that most of the nutrient and species interfacing goes on, most of the killing, most of the eating, most of the transfer of the nutrients, most of the breeding and so on. This is also an area where a lot of nutrients are transferred from, say, the equator towards the north pole on bird flyways, insect flyways. These are critical to adding micro-nutrients to environments and so on. It's really like saying that we all know that a city will not function if the railroads, the railroad stations and the airlines and truck lines are shut down. I mean, the city is there. There is foodstuff and there are buildings. There is hardware, but the moment the transportation system shuts down, very quickly the whole city begins to fall apart. That's a very interesting point that is not evident with Renaissance modes of thinking but rather more with systems modes of thinking, with what they call a systems mode, which means that, for example, even if only one percent or two percent of all the goods that are actually in a society are in circulation at a given moment cease circulating, it will cause a breakdown of the entire system. Quite curious. And it has nothing to do with

the quantity of material being moved. It has to do with the very nature of the movement. It's as if critical attitudes occur now and then. So suppose for a moment that you stop eating, your diminution of weight would actually be rather minor but your ability to function will shut down very, very fast. You simply need to have this ongoing supply of various things to metabolize and so on. And it's this fact, which is not about quantity but rather what you might call circulation, that makes an infrastructure work and this point is fundamentally lost in things like farming. It's not to say that farmers don't know it. But the cost of farming is, I have a certain amount of land, I plough the land, put a crop in the land, put some fertilizer and it's always in sort of quantities, when what you really also must be aware of is the insect vectors, the bird vectors, the wild animal vectors going on in this area, which, in the long term, are necessary to its vitality. Agriculture as we know it tends to deteriorate. The mid-west of America is a good example of that.

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PP: What percentage of your time is aimed at politicians and state assemblies and so on, rather than on exhibiting in galleries?

PF: Presently almost all of my time is dedicated to scientists and policy-makers. I have been profoundly abused by state authorities. By saying abused I mean a real attempt has been made to convert the company Ocean Earth into a front, a cover for providing satellite imagery to various governments, or let's just say, covert activities because after all we are a

convenient source. The very first event was when we did the Falklands for the BBC and at the door arrives somebody from the British admiralty and the US navy saying, "Dear Mr. Fend, please leave the room. Your material will now be used to help the British admiralty." And for some property it is illegal what they're doing but we're a convenient cover because it's private enterprise doing its activity and we can be essentially commandeered for that effort. That kind of thing went on for a long time with various governments, whether it's Dutch or British or here in Germany. And they having committed these wrongs against us for their purposes because they're a bit pioneering and have some hard information, then they tried to criminalize me in particular and us in general.

PP: That's not difficult if the powers-that-be really want to.

PF: They tried some pretty nasty tricks which unfortunately got to some people at the newspapers and they got exposed. So they realize that it's pretty difficult. I'm fairly able to make people look bad, unfortunately for them, and they know that. That's why I mean I would get passed all that, now.

PP: The rule is knowing which skeletons are in which closets.

PF: In a very real sense they know also that I know a lot of things, but they don't bother saying it.

PP: You could disappear so easily.

PF: Well that's why I just don't bother saying it. By the way, it's not so easy anymore. I want to get the point here which is that having had, shall we say, all these experiences, all these escapades, it's okay. All is fair in love and war. Certain things have been attempted. They were and I'm still here. I'm not going to try to embarrass anybody especially. I could but I won't. Now to be very precise, we'll put it on the record. Having the past five years sort of begun to pool things together and avoid being wiped out, so to speak, and having had these exposés in terms of the *Herald Tribune* and other newspapers and certainly letting them know that you really don't want to touch me or otherwise you get a stun, having avoided a whole confrontation that was attempted by somebody, unfortunately in my house, not very nice, having avoided all those problems and having meantime made it a publicly recognized fact that there are all those basins, there's all this satellite monitoring, that the idea of satellite monitoring was to work within the basin framework and not to do espionage. I don't care about espionage. It's boring. And having established that we really have an ecological program, whether it's in the Persian Gulf area, we don't really have a war program. We don't care about these wars. They're boring in the end. But we really wanted to find a way of identifying new technologies that will help to restore the eco-system, that will help to restore the marshes, for example. And that, in effect, in administrative war, as there is this change in property relations, we can introduce to the area a new

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property concept of marshes or a new property concept of art on site like that of de Maria's, Smithson's, whatever or satellite observations in the manner of Keith Sonnier or new technologies basically which will be much more in harmony with the ecology or a new fuel base, for example.

PP: It sounds very Bauhaus inspired, this form follows function approach.

PF: Well, that's praise but I'm a little bit taken aside by the term Bauhaus because I would like to think that the ideas are really a kind of Constructivism.

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PP: Well would you say that your program is art-inspired design and not the other way round?

PF: Of course it's design more than art. I'm not an artist. I never professed to be an artist. I keep on trying to tell people I'm not an artist. I always say I'm an architect. Everything I'm doing is architecture.

PP: Let's talk a little bit about that. Does modern architecture fail more often than not?

PF: Yes, absolutely. Because and I can be very plausible here and very rigorous in the old-fashioned sense. Leone Battista Alberti—I always quote him—says in his four books on architecture, a rather famous treatise, that the essential question of architecture is the city, not just the house. That's why I take exception to the idea of dwelling because we're really rather more interested in community. I mean I could get a dwelling in the middle of nowhere but that's not architecture, that's just

building a hut. Architecture is the task of building the streets.

PP: We call that urban planning.

*PF: Well, okay. But let me get back to Alberti for a second. He says that the city is the subject and that the first task of the city and anybody making a city is to have clean air, clean water and a good view. That was his phrase. Well, in the old days that meant don't build a city near a marsh because you had malaria, *mal aria*, bad air, and if you dump waste and you have cow shit, it's going to go into the city and cause dysentery or something.*

PP: It sounds like nomadism is an answer today.

PF: Well, okay. That's true but that's a certain kind of solution to a question about how to have some kind of packaging of shelter and then move in. I don't want to suggest for a moment that nomadism even today has an artificial substrate because you have to have airports and trains, highways, infrastructure. In any event you are trying to build things or install things into the nature which will allow for a condition which is suitable to human beings and some kind of society in which there is clean air, clean water and a good view. a good view more or less means decent circulation.

PP: That sounds like a graveyard, clean air, clean water and a good view.

PF: It's a bit boring but unfortunately no major city in the world today has any of those things. Mexico City, for example, certainly

does not have clean air or clean water.

PP: It appears so simple, what you're asking.

PF: Yes, it's rock bottom.

PP: Why then has criticism of your project as being overly theoretical and didactic been lodged against you?

PF: I've actually said this a number of times. It's not as though I don't hammer this constantly over the head. It's a very boring and standard thing. The thing is that to do that means a change in the fuel base and to do that you need to have a really thorough waste recycling system for every city and to do that you need to have some organization and infrastructure in building such that you can have a great view, look upon a prospect, have a kind of horizon line, you're not in a cave or a sort of gully someplace and you can, everybody can have a chance to sort of look upon something or other that's not unpleasant. So that last part is design or you might call it or visual aspects. The first two are more or less mechanical: how to do the plumbing and what kind of firewood.

PP: Aren't the mechanics though based on business?

PF: Well, it's based on property, yes.

PP: Okay, you want to call profit, property. But those choices are based on parameters other than social well-being. Aren't we being naive to think otherwise? And so as not to point the finger and call you simply naive, how do you change the deci-

sion-making structure to implement your ideas?

PF: That's why I have to get back to the question and I'm afraid to use the word, war. What I mean by that, when you have a change of property relations and you have a new opportunity for new property relations then you also have the new technology which works for cities. That is to say we know after the Civil War in America with the success of the industrial North rebuilding over the agricultural south that there was a decision then that would make all cities service, an important term, and quite literally somebody developed an integrated city service system called vertically integrated oil companies. That person's name is John D. Rockefeller, who in 1867, two years after the ending of the Civil War, began the first vertically integrated oil company, which is the present-day model.

PP: What does vertically integrated mean?

PF: It means that everything between the well-head and the consumer is in one corporate package. All stages, exploration, drilling, refining, trucking, sale, the whole thing, packaging. These are the largest industrial corporations of the West today: Shell and Exxon. These are also the foundation of every economy in the world today. They all have a vertically integrated system, whether it's state-run or privately held. And they're also responsible to some extent for the fossil fuel problem today. I mean if we want to have a diminution, as the scientists say, the doctor says—I'm going to quote the doctor for a moment as a metaphor—then we must have a diminution

of sixty percent in fossil fuel utilization now, or else. The fact is these companies which have all their assets and profits and careers and everything else stuck in that means of production. What are they going to do? They can't really. Not in any kind of timetable that's now. They won't. It's not a matter of condemnation, it's just a matter of property. They have property which is no longer appropriate. So the only thing you can do is have a new form of property emerge some place or other where one will essentially be able to replace that which was the integrated fossil fuel companies and I might say at the moment that the best place to do that is Yugoslavia, because Yugoslavia is, I guess, cut off from oil and does have at least something of a coast and does, did make an invitation to me and my company to work there when they were still a country.

PP: What would the fuel base there be replaced with?

PF: One of our points was direct solar and so on, we talked about that, everybody knows about those things.

PP: It takes fossil fuel to make those. Are they efficient enough?

PF: Well I'm arguing that you need to always have a hydro-carbon substrate. I mean you got to make plastics, you have to drive a car, some kind of cars, you can't fly an airplane with solar panels, pretty hard. And although there are some people who think we can make hydrogen engines some day and we already

know that this will be very, very dangerous. One little car crash and the whole town is dead. So I'm just suggesting that we would go with well there are various scenarios but in any event as the Miti in Japan has determined also, the Ministry for International Trade and Industry, we should definitely be thinking that most of our hydrocarbons will come from seaweed. Why? Well because this is the most productive vegetation on earth.

PP: Would change the balance of things in the ocean?

PF: Oh, absolutely, These are very real facts. That's why you do satellite monitoring. You just to do satellite monitoring on a continuous basis of the area and by the way there are many areas of the ocean that already have too much algae. We know that too and they are very damaged by that situation. So there's plenty of algae to be harvested. I mean Venice is glutted with the material.

PP: What sort of exhaust is given when algae is burnt or is it?

PF: Nothing. Carbon dioxide and water, water vapor. No problem. So, in other words, in an ideal scenario, we're talking about systems where you have eighty percent methane yield from fermentation of the algae and methane burns clean and it also has no greenhouse effect because it burns within the annual cycle. I mean you harvest this, all the technology exists but nobody has property so to speak in the ocean the way they have properties, wells, in the ground. If I get a concession

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for oil in Kuwait or something that's a lot of money for me.

PP: Where can you get support for your ideas?

PF: The art world has first of all functioned over a period of time of allowing me a relatively sheltered situation away from the media, because I was kicked out of the media pretty much of showing the Persian Gulf, things about Libya, things about SS20 bases in Russia, showing things about Albania and the Adriatic, making people look at the point so to speak and I've been able to nurture this for a while and develop a profile.

PP: Now you need a lot of money?

PF: It is clear that one can only enact a change with capital and also, I might say, with permission to work on a site, to gain access to a site. Now this particular area in Montenegro, for example, that we were recommended to work in, an architect, another artist, myself, a computer scientist, is quite obviously a very good place to work in. It's a kind of microcosm of the ocean, not polluted, an ideal testing site. There was an investment of about \$500,000,000 by British real estate people to build there. This was with the then Yugoslav regime or Montenegro regime. Well, of course that's all on hold or not disposable at this moment, or maybe even reinvested in something else. The point is that there was an interest by people to investing large sums of money to do something interesting and new there.

A gallery in London, having a good busi-

ness-like manner, is prepared to act on my conversations with the foreign office in England, the foreign ministry, about this subject, about what we had and so on, what's going on because it would be very interesting obviously for the British government to foster a reallocation of its investments, investors in Montenegro, say, as a kind of a post-war Marshall Plan or whatever, or just a post-war business deal. And when you have a post-war condition you have a kind of a tabula rasa, a chance to start all over again and if the foreign ministry likes the package that is now being prepared and presented to them, then of course they would be willing to underwrite or allow for or encourage us to do it.

PP: Does the foreign ministry really take you seriously?

PF: Absolutely.

PP: Do you think you can trust them?

PF: We already can.

PP: Then your goals are synchronized?

PF: Well, obviously there's always, if you will, somewhat delicate matters. My degree of trust is dependent of the line of politics, interests and let's just say that I'm aware of the fact that the British and the French, for example, would somehow like to have a position in eastern Europe instead of just the Germans. It's the age-old rivalry and so on going back to World War I and II, and if I can help the British in some way or if they can be facilitated, this would be something that the

Germans don't like and that is what the Germans are very upset with me now.

PP: Who are the members of Ocean Earth?

PF: The company?

PP: Yes, the founding members?

PF: I have to say that all the founding members are frightened off. I mean nobody who was a founding member of the company is now involved with the company, not in any kind of practical way. Frightened of by a number of things, one of which was just a troubles, there have been big troubles.

PP: Dangerous?

PF: It was pretty rough. We'd like to think that war is behind us in the sense that I think that we've achieved a certain level of profile and also we all must remember that as you get recognized, as you get somewhat famous, well, as you get noticed, it becomes harder to have you be crushed because it would cause a scandal and also I might say you enter the kind of bloodstream of consciousness or the stream of consciousness and then you find ways of playing with that. I would not, I think, at this point, go back to the given. In fact at this point I'm going to try to get new blood. There are a number of people who want to get involved and people who are my age.

PP: Why not form a research institute?

PF: We're getting some of those things together in France. We have two sites already and there's some real support actually. I must

say that for all of my sense of dismay, or I should say, ennui, boredom, with much of what goes on in France and for all my relative, shall we say, lack of respect for the French art world, I am very impressed, very pleased by the fact that a government agency has cooperated with Ocean Earth on some work.

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