

Why New Worlds Conceived by Artists Do Not Get Built

Art, being a permutation or adaptation of that which is known, bodies forth the new.

It bodies forth, at the least, mutations.

These mutations, curiously, coincide with other fields of innovation, such as science and technology. And the mutations, the changes in artistic attitude and feeling, will in successful societies co-function with innovation in other fields, helping to form an intellectual and spiritual tissue by which innovations can be transformed into a built world.

When societies are under ultimate stress, with their existence visibly at stake, as in war, necessity tends to press for a conjunction of innovations and a consequent co-function of mutations in art with changes in related fields, like science.

Those societies which survive such stress, expanding in power and wealth, have allowed innovating, mutation-producing artists--the inventors of new material and visual paradigms--to extend their practice beyond the studio into the world of industry, construction, research and even war. Amidst the city-state wars of the Renaissance, artists like da Vinci could also become military and civil engineers, and like Michelangelo could go on to designing the-then chief edifice of mass media and culture, St. Peter's Basilica. Amidst the first-emerging nation states, like 17th-century France, a painter named Vauban could become the prime constructor of state-of-the-art fortifications, or another painter named Le Notre could design the ideal gardens and cities for the State. Even during the invasion of North America by Europeans, manifested in the wars of the US Army with the native "Indians", artists played a crucial role in the invention of new signaling and communication systems, to cover vast expanses in a simulcast network similar to cyberspace: with the telegraph.

But in the Twentieth Century, more so than usual, possibly ever, the innovators in art have been cut off from innovators in other fields. They have been confined to domains of "culture" or "arts & leisure", and they have been reduced to the status of domesticated pets, able to provide amusement, possibly intelligent, but certainly never with the power to build or effect anything that alters the industrial or constructed world. At best, the artist--like an alert dog--can make a loud bark, otherwise called "political art." The result, for society (let alone the artists), is ruinous. Society loses track of its instincts, its intuitions, its imagings, all tools developed through millenia of evolution to equip human individuals, then

societies, for survival.

Rather than speak in advocacy of power for art, one could put the issue to you. If the works of Joseph Beuys have any value, if his phrases mean something, then what would it mean for society if, as an artist-leader, he is "Chief of the Hunters"? Might this possibly correspond with emerging scientific belief, and even regional-planning talk, that if societies are to evolve they must return to harvesting a diversity of wild species from the land and sea, in forms of hunting, fishing & gathering, instead of farming? Or, if Robert Smithson and Walter De Maria have any value, might not their constructions, like Spiral Jetty or Lightning Field, be buildable again and again, not just once, to become new ways of shaping terrain? Or, if Nam June Paik or Keith Sonnier or Paul Sharits have pioneered new forms of information display, with greater impact and efficiency, why have not the military put their discoveries to use? Why, instead, do the discoveries only get superficially mimicked, as by the architects for an airport, making an advertisement board?

Much of the problem appears in this distinction, which I must make, between artists and architects. Artists portray or display; architects build. In most cultures, even up to the early twentieth century in the industrial cultures, a person starting out as an artist, such as a painter or draftsman, could graduate from one rank to the next, to eventually become a sort of artist-general, namely: an Architect. For the Russian Constructivists, for example, a successful artist could very often expect to become an industrial designer or architect. In wartime Germany even, where survival was a primary issue, once again the artist evolved into architect could be entrusted with enormous power, as in Speer, to organize the entire wartime industry. One could expect to graduate from the canvas to the entire built, infrastuctural landscape. But now, if one is an artist, one cannot hope to get farther than, say, Chris Burden, building at the Whitney Biennial, a survey of New Art, no more than sprawling models of toy cities.

The enfeeblement of artists generates a direct danger to the survival of all.

It is generally agreed, for example, that the construction of the Three Gorges Dam in China will sharply reduce the bioproductivity of the East China Sea, and will consequently alter evapotranspiration cycles and weather patterns in the most populous parts of East Asia, including Korea and Japan. Even official investment organs, like the Export-Import Bank of the United States and the World Bank, have come out against building the giant dam, on ecological grounds. I have discussed with Nam

June Paik, for example, that if artists like Robert Smithson are to be taken seriously, and if their new forms of construction on the land are to have any significance, then the practices and aesthetic of Smithson should be brought to bear on the Yangtze. Engineers have certainly been tendering proposals for construction alternatives to a giant one-wall dam; why are not artists also bringing forth their imaginings as derived from the ideas of Smithson? What happens instead, in the world of art, is that Smithson is relegated to art history, anyone trying to pursue or elaborate on his practices is seen as "second-generation" or practicing "earth art aesthetics", and all the innovations or mutations of a Smithson, or a Heizer, or a De Maria, ends up frozen in time, like a still-born fetus, to be seen, to be recorded, but never to be used, never to come alive.

Twenty years ago, when I was working for Gordon Matta-Clark and writing about the primary-sector implications of Dennis Oppenheim, Robert Smithson, Paik and so on, I expected that finance capital would be found to realize entirely new-built landscapes and cities, all based on these artists' revolutionary paradigms. But now, what I see is each pioneer ending up trapped, trapped beneath a glass ceiling that allows no penetration, consequently spinning downward, all around inside a cage, in small circles until death. Michelangelo would graduate from sculpture to building the most important media building of his time. Vauban would graduate from painting to producing the anti-missile defense system of his time. But there is no such advancement, no such breakthrough to new terrains of permutative practice, for pioneers like Vito Acconci, Dennis Oppenheim, or even Dan Graham. There are no buildings, even, being built by these constructors.

The paralysis extends not only into the art world, but also into architecture. A pioneer like Zaha Hadid repeatedly fails to get any structures built, in the real world, while the tedious, safe repetitors of SOM or HOK, giant professedly anonymous architecture firms, populate the world's polluted cities with more fuel-guzzling, heat-emitting towers. Neither field, of art or architecture, have any continuum to share. One cannot move from one field to the other, or back, because both are entrenched in their own guilds and societies. With each field isolated, they are both unable to enter the world of financial and political decision making enough to help effect truly new ways the world gets built. Airports and buildings get built anew. Even resort cities (Cancun) or petroleum-terminal cities (Yanbu) can get built all new. But there is not one successful, or even attempted, answer to the problems affecting all the world cities today, problems singled out by Alberti in his Ten Books on Architecture as paramount for architecture: making sure that,

for each inhabitant, there is clean air, clean water, room for pleasant circulation and defense from invasion. Can Milan, Cairo, Mexico City or Rome, all great cities, claim to have even approached a solution to questions of air or water pollution? Can Tokyo say it has solved the question of water supply? Can Berlin say it is safe from invasion by industrial chemicals emitted further west?

Given that the human body, occupying space, has only so four options for organization of its informational field, namely in the dimensions of the plane, color, elevation and time, we can conclude that material innovation, or so-called "visual" art, can only have four dimensional manifestations. These are: drawing (x,y), painting (x,y,color (c)), sculpture (x,y,z,c) and architecture (x,y,z,c and time). The last form considers that which we as humans occupy. We occupy space through time. Why, now, is there no continuum of practice through these practices of art? Why is there no continuum from the first exercises of idea, in drawing and painting, which includes video and film, to the full-dimensional, full-color surroundings of our selves, the Built World? Effecting this continuum is my aim. Doing so, I hope to make many ideas now immanent solely in art become part not of a catalog of an Unbuilt World, but a Built one. Fend.

After 20 years in the art world, Peter Fend begins to penetrate the profession of architecture. The aim is to establish an entirely new practice, treating the globe as House. In this, he links up with allegedly-radical architects like Raoul Bunschoten, and he works on site-infrastructure projects with architect Kevin Gannon or artist-architect Susan Jennings, and on site-monitoring projects with architect George Chaikin and other artist-members of a team started in 1979 called "Space Force." The legal instrument is Ocean Earth Development Corporation. To develop a new energy supply for the city that assures clean air, Ocean Earth contracts with artists Inga Svala Thorsdottir (Iceland) and Jan Hovo (Norway), architect Heidi Mardon (New Zealand), artist Rob Scholte (Netherlands) and naval architect Marc Lombard (France). The latest project correlates two cities, Tokyo and Genoa, with teams of architects, under the label, "Atopic Site."

Here, a balloon-suspended walkway held up by clean-fuel exhaust, in turn affording a vegetation canopy, for fresher, milder air.