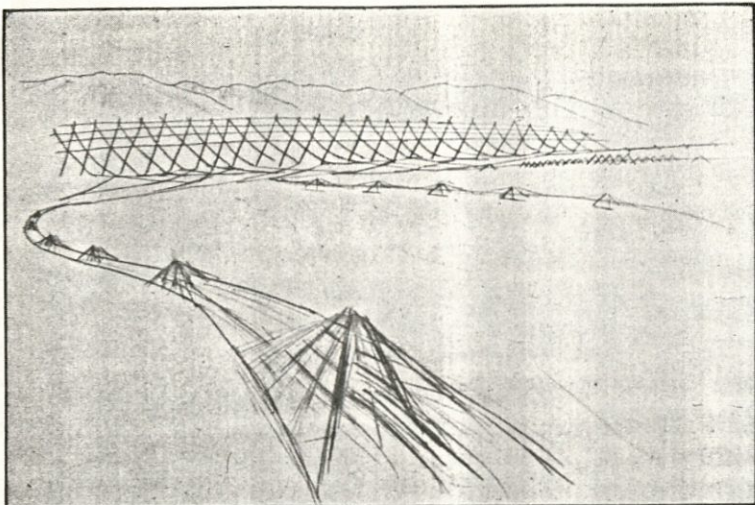


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Peter Fend, Megastructures, 1979.

PETER FEND'S GLOBAL ARCHITECTURE

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Back in 1963, Buckminster Fuller wrote hopefully that the coming decades might see the emergence of what he called "comprehensive designers," who would be a synthesis of "artist, inventor, mechanic, objective economist and evolutionary strategist." It may be surprising to find someone meeting Fuller's specifications now active in the labyrinth of artists' spaces in Lower Manhattan. Only 30 years old, Peter Fend is an unusual jack-of-all-trades; even in the plurality of the current New York art scene. He has a formidable background in biology, physics, zoology, history, architecture, urban planning, and economics, and his competence in a wide range of related areas is remarkable. He worked briefly at the World Bank, did regional planning in the Midwest, has extensive wilderness living experience, and has worked nights at the Fulton Fish Market. For the last several years he has participated in a variety of artist-run projects and exhibitions in New York, including the Times Square and Real Estate Shows and the New York New Wave Show at P.S. 1.

Taking off from the American landscape tradition of Frederick Law Olmsted and Robert Smithson, Fend's work is based on a vision of the world as a living earthwork and on the goal of forging a functioning and habitable global environment. In articles, drawings, maps, video, and multi-media proposals, Fend practices architectural thinking on a large scale. For him any kind of urban planning is inseparable from the entire physical system of air, land, and water by which a city lives and breathes, and he integrally links his architecture to working with oceans, farming, and energy sources. Although active in designing urban megastructures, he believes the most immediate task is to make secure and viable the biological underpinning of city life. What distinguishes Fend from other artists involved in large-scale environmental projects are the visionary scope of his work, his insistence that environmental engineering entails major political and economic reorganization, and the seriousness of his efforts to put his plans in practice.

Two of his central concerns are pollution control and renewable energy sources. Fend is an expert on waste treatment and conversion methods; in articles and lectures he discusses how urban and chemical wastes can be broken down into hydrocarbons, emphasizing how this hydrocarbon base not only can be turned into energy but also into food in the form of yeast and fungi. At the same time Fend sees the oceans offering another, and potentially infinite, supply of both these essentials. He demonstrates persuasively that meeting food and energy needs through ocean farming of kelp and through waste conversion can be extremely profitable, thus creating financial incentive for keeping the seas unpolluted. The trick is to convince the public they can eat oil and garbage.

For Fend, such new forms of food production would diminish the need for land-based agriculture. An article he wrote several years ago began, "Agriculture will destroy us," and proceeded to explain how farming depletes soil, reduces diversity of species, removes essentials for higher life from circulation, and releases biocides from fertilizers into rivers and seas. His post-agricultural world is a science-fiction vision of immense tracts of jungle, marshland, and savanna, all vital components of a living planet. Instead of domesticating farm animals, he proposes vast areas of open range land which large herds of wild animals would be allowed to repopulate, and he cites recent research proving, much to the dismay of vegetarians, that more meat for human consumption can be produced per acre on wild land than through traditional animal farming. Again, he looks to meet human needs while preserving the land's richness and diversity.

One of the most controversial aspects of Fend's plans is how he links economic and political organization with his proposed ocean-based industries. Key to his thinking is the idea of structuring his environmental management schemes on a decentralized and local basis. Much of his recent exhibited work has been about defining viable geographical regions that could support ocean farming programs. After several years of studying world geography and ocean currents, Fend has redrawn the political map of the globe into new configurations defined entirely by topography. Instead of current national boundaries, Fend sees the world as an aggregate of watershed basin areas, shaped by mountain ranges and the flow of water to the sea. Each of these zones he identifies as a "saltwater polity," eco-

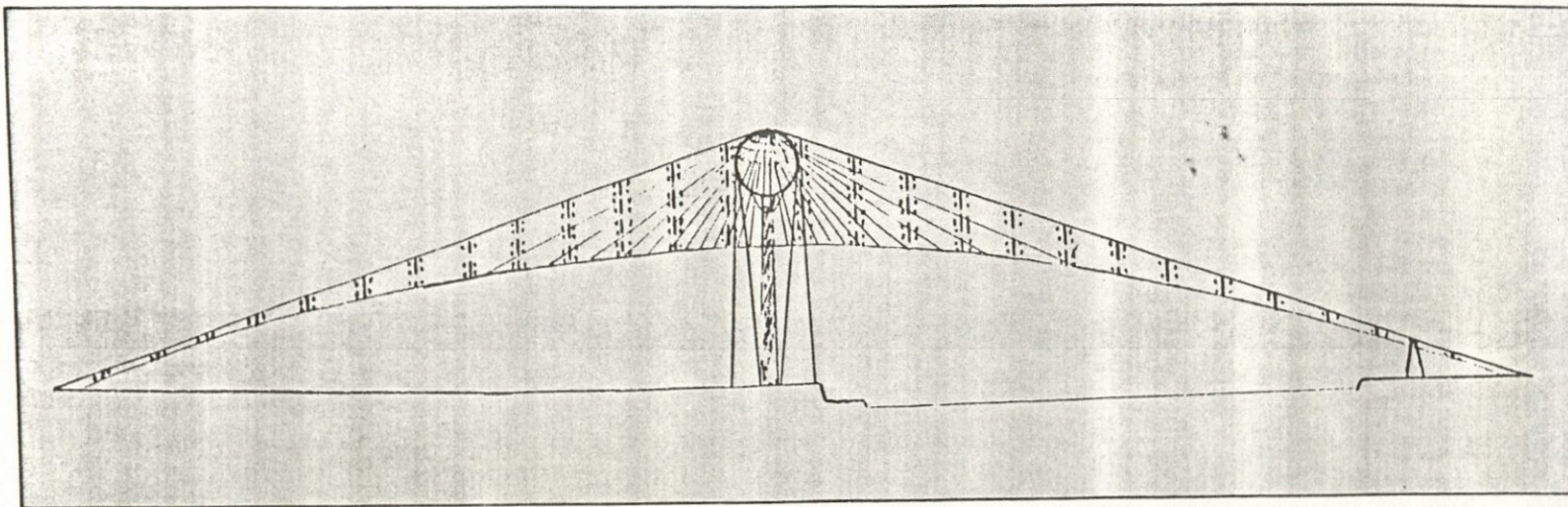


Peter Fend, Drainage Basins of US and USSR: Potential Autonomies, 1979.

nomically autonomous territory, self-sufficient in food and energy. Like a 20th-century Physiocrat, Fend believes that an economy is a natural system in which all wealth originates directly from the earth, that economic principles should derive directly from the physiology of the body. Notions of production and consumption are replaced by exchange and circulation.

Fend delights in showing how many of his topographically determined basin areas closely correspond to regions sought by separatist movements or which match the territorial ambitions of various imperial powers throughout history. In a project called *Iran Plan*, he showed how Iran could be split up into five autonomous basin regions that recognize the territory of the Kurds, of oil-rich southwest Iran (the current war zone), and of other nationalities now subsumed by today's borders. His new regional mappings also suggest solutions for important international problems. Pointing to a mountain-bound area containing most of the Sinai, Fend says confidently, "This will be Palestine," and he elaborates an image of a new Palestinian state with an economy based on fishing industries and ocean production of methane and hydrocarbons. "Underground water sources will be tapped, dry lake areas fertilized, causing increased vegetation. Railways, pipelines, linear megastructural settlements will connect coastal industries with inland cities. The Sinai will be a green land again." Whether such a transformation actually happens is not the issue; what matters to Fend now is to expand notions of the possible in global thinking.

Fend insists that Renaissance ideas of space still govern attitudes to the environment. Just as quattrocento painting described a world in which space existed independently of its contents, it also implied a space that would remain constant des-



Peter Fend, Prototype of Windbreak-Canopy for City, Supported by Exhaust Heat Ducted from Buildings, 1979.

pite the extraction of material from it, a notion behind present-day exploitation of natural resources. Fend also sees this Renaissance idea of space persisting in recent art. He is critical of Alan Sonfist's fenced-off parcel of land, off West Houston Street, which attempts to recreate the original vegetation of prehistoric Manhattan. Fend sees this framing-off of space as a falsification in that it denies all the vectors of air, rain, garbage, birds, and insects that weave that space into a much larger environmental mesh. Futurist art was important in giving Fend a sense of space as a field of multiple interpenetrations in which no aesthetic or technical problem can be isolated from the entire active and mobile territory in which it is implicated. Other, more recent art contributed to this view of the world as circulatory, in flux, and intestinal: gravity and flow system pieces by Smithson and Oppenheim, Beuys' *Fat Corner*, Carolee Schneemann's *Meat Joy*, and Klaus Rinke's tubing.

Since he became active in the New York art world, Fend has worked almost exclusively in artist-run or artist-controlled undertakings. In 1979 he joined in a collaborative association with five other artists who had all felt the need for a structure to facilitate expanding their activities beyond existing art institutions. Those involved—Jenny Holzer, Colen Fitzgibbon, Peter Nadin, Richard Prince, Robin Winters, and Fend—formed an organization roughly modeled on a law firm but which offered aesthetic and media counsel rather than legal counsel. Their business card read: "Practical esthetic services adaptable to client situations / Our consultation includes a review of your needs and suggestions for realistic action."

Some of Fend's independent New York projects have been planning schemes for parts of the city. One of his best received works was his contribution to the January 1980 Real Estate Show. Titled *Delancey Street Goes to the Sea*, it was a detailed plan about how the Lower East Side actually could secede from Con Ed and restructure its tax: payment and rent system to enable it to incorporate separately from the rest of the city (as Beverly Hills is to Los Angeles). At the heart of the plan was a community-owned and -run waste treatment facility that would generate self-sufficient energy, as well as marketable food and fuel products. An outgrowth of this project was an elaborate proposal, exhibited last fall in Duisburg, Germany, for a radical reorganization of the steel industry and landscape of the entire Ruhr region.

In the much discussed Times Square Show, Fend displayed an architectural project for midtown Manhattan in which 42nd Street would be leveled and replaced by a green swath of parks, trees, and gardens. Overhead a megastructural skeleton would serve as a constantly changing bazaar and entertainment area. Some Times Square Show participants felt Fend's plan was too respectable for that event and were disappointed that it would have "de-sleazed" the 42nd Street area by wiping out the porno industry.

Recently, Fend has initiated what is his potentially most important enterprise to date. He is now coordinating Ocean Earth Construction and Development Corporation, a legally incorporated firm which he hopes will be a credible and effective base from which to deal with business, scientific, and government in-

stitutions, as well as a structure to accommodate other artists' projects that reach beyond the gallery. Identified as Ocean Earth Corporation, Fend now can communicate with various companies that have expressed interest in some of his specific designs and can deal with them in a trade secret-protected situation. Some of the ideas he plans to market include an offshore seaweed harvesting rig, waste conversion equipment, and a modular architectural system involving air freight containers. Other plans include tensile canopies for urban climate control, an international video distribution program, and megastructure frameworks. Robert Smithson's work as a consultant for the design of the Dallas-Fort Worth airport is often singled out as an example of the artist breaking out of his/her traditional role to become a participant in non-art planning. Fend's latest venture seems to realize many of the possibilities implied in Smithson's airport project.

If Fend's corporate undertaking gets nowhere, it can be chalked off as another in a string of failures by artists to operate effectively outside an art world context. But even a small measure of success would encourage the hope that artists can have significant influence on economic, scientific, and social planning. Cultural institutions have reduced the artist's role to side-show performer, one who will never play in the big tent, and most artists, even those who insist they want a joining of art and life, are enamored of their own social marginality and have a romantic stake in their own powerlessness. If Marcel Duchamp's fake Monte Carlo bonds of 1924 bespeak the detachment of most artists from major networks of power and exchange, the legal documents inaugurating Fend's corporation signify an alternative conception of the artist's role in which aesthetic and social thinking become indistinguishable.

Peter Fend, High-Yield Bottom-Harvesting Seaweed Rig, 1980.

