

JAMES BOND RUNS THE ART WORLD

Peter Fend

CHASE MANHATTAN

Noah Barker & Dora Budor

Opening 30 March 2023

At the time of writing, we've gone back and forth between several titles for the exhibition: 'China V China', a title Peter Fend has been pondering for some time; 'James Bond Runs The Art World', an absurdly pop catch-all evoking imperial paranoia and the possibility of a secret figure holding global geopolitics in their grasp; 'You Only Live Twice', another reference to James Bond, this time also featuring an unspecified 'you' and alluding to the sorts of ambitions seldom realised in a single lifetime; and the iconoclastic 'Star Wars are boring, Czar wars rage today', with a line break between 'boring' and 'Czar'. All of these options rely on contradictions in terms – combining wordplay and syntax errors with planned failures and veiled realities, marrying high and low and mixing loud exclamations with immediacy. In the end, we've opted for two titles. Self-representation and dialectics stand up better today than contracts or their ideology, or so it seems.

The exhibition features reproductions of a series of drawings by Peter Fend from 2019, now lost, and a collaborative video work by Noah Barker and Dora Budor from 2021–22. Fend's originals have been replaced with digital reprints made from high-resolution scans. This, we believe, highlights the artist's desire to disseminate his work and connect beyond the boundaries of authorship and ownership. Fend first made the drawings in 2019, after observing that decisive battles in history have often occurred – frequently enough to warrant attention – at the edges of saltwater basins. He first noticed this while researching the battles of the American War of Independence and later applied this 'design' retrospectively and prospectively to other pivotal battles from recent history.

The lines seen in the drawings mark strategic decisions. Notably, they record strategic missteps in and around water that have led to major catastrophes – human, ecological, cultural. What would happen if the edges of basins were recognized as 'natural' military frontiers? How many losses might have been spared through the recognition of such limits? One may also wonder, in line with the theories of evolutionary biology, whether the outcomes of these historical battles had their basis in animal behaviour stretching back to our origins in the sea. What is clear is that war in and of itself is a form of migration.

In the first room, Chase Manhattan plays. Noah Barker and Dora Budor's collaborative video work is a psycho-geographical *dérive* capturing the takedown of a skyscraper that once occupied an entire city block at 270 Park Avenue in New York. Built by Natalie de Blois, The Union Carbide was the tallest tower designed by a female architect in the city until its demolition in 2019, when it became the largest intentionally demolished in the world. A taller skyscraper, commissioned by JP Morgan Chase is already being erected on the same site. A slideshow of images taken through the windows of a car follows a dump truck carrying rebar and concrete from the demolished building all the way across Manhattan to the Holland Tunnel, which passes under the Hudson River, for recycling in New Jersey. The new skyscraper was an inaugural project begun in 2019 after then-Mayor of New York Bill de Blasio's re-zoning of East Midtown, which allowed for the unrestricted sale and exchange of air rights between its 57 blocks. The first part of the video's sound, composed by the band Stubborn, is part of the geographical evidence presented by the work: an after-the-fact soundtrack stretching from Uptown to Downtown, reflecting the plummeting and mythological bifurcation of the New York dream. Stubborn consists of New York artists Brad Kronz, Jeffery Joyal and Valerie Keane. Their drone composition conveys both sombre, funereal contemplation and the city's dreary carnivalism, which seems to mirror the seminal deliriums of Rem Koolhaas' *Delirious New York*. 'Seminal' comes from 'semen', which brings a touch of phallogocentric and erectile eccentricity; 'groundbreaking' might have been a more literal, even synaesthetic, choice of word, the better to conjure the fumes of burnt plastic and welding, the microparticles in the air. The second portion of the sound has been interpreted by KVANTUM (Stefan Tcherepnin and Paul Sigerhall) and plays like a casual post-opening jam session before speeding up towards a hysteric, uncontrolled rupture.

In a city where rubble is synonymous with post-disaster, off-centredness and megalomania, it is worth seeing and hearing these images in order to contrast the horizontal or circular movement of 'recycling' with the vertical movement of conquest that hinders it. The world belonging to and orchestrated from the interiors of buildings like those on which Barker and Budor have turned their gaze is now underpinned by another form of hegemony, far less material and all-encompassing: the notion of resilience.

Ubiquitous in discourse, brought up whenever we think of past, present or future disasters, 'resilience' has for some years been spreading its optimism like a mollifying remedy: everything will be alright. But for whom will everything be fine, and for what? In light of the history of war (now a generic term in Fend's vocabulary, for example), resilience reveals its programmatic cynicism: the living can be made cannon fodder if it serves the interests of survivability in the abstract.

Our Ways of Life

In a recent note, the consulting agency McKinsey Sustainability advised states around the world that they should be planning to mitigate the decades of warming that are now 'locked in' to the climate system by past emissions and physical inertia. States should implement "innovative ways to build resilience against climate hazards. For example, the regional government of Quintana Roo on Mexico's Yucatán Peninsula insured its coral reefs in an arrangement with an insurance firm, providing incentives for the insurer to manage any degradation, and a redesigned levee system put in place after Hurricane Katrina may have mitigated the worst effects of Hurricane Ida for the citizens of New Orleans".¹

It has been a minute since the buzzword began its drone, and in that time its meanings and sources have multiplied. A first appearance of 'resilience' from the pen of Francis Bacon in the seventeenth century, its rigorous definition by mechanical physics in the nineteenth century, its use in trauma theory in the twentieth century and its reconceptualisation in the 1970s within a certain strand of scientific ecology, not to mention its kinship with neoliberalism, have all been carefully recorded. However, in order to understand how resilience emerged as a new frame of reference for the management of disasters, and consequently for sustaining our way of life, we need to look at the development of modern war in all its mutations, starting with the first modern strategic battles, which were defined by strategic bombing.

In the first quarter of the twentieth century, a group of officers in the United States formulated a new doxa of warfare based on air power. This was the beginning of bombing as we know it. Previously, only ground assaults against forces massed in close proximity to the front line had been possible, but aircraft were now capable of flying over this bulwark of flesh and steel to attack the 'vital centres' of national infrastructure directly. This marked the onset of a new strategic vision best described as 'looking down' and a theory of war that emphasises targeting the economy from above. Dropping bombs means interrupting military supply chains and undermining the morale of civilian populations by depriving them of life-sustaining essentials.

Thus, dropping bombs need not mean destroying everything. Modern weapons may be mobilised to hit key targets, critical infrastructure, precisely because a nation's activity depends primarily on the availability of a set of basic resources – energy, food and water, certain materials – and channels by which to supply them. Any obstruction of these can lead to deadlock. The failure of a single cog in the machine can set off a devastating chain reaction. Today, irrespective of developments in aerial warfare – such as the evolution of drone technology, allowing for the administration of so-called 'clean wars' – this same rationale continues to underpin military conflict, just as it does struggles on other scales, such as the war against capital, strikes in France against pension reforms (currently underway, as we write, in March 2023) and various forms of cyber warfare: if one thing fails (or can be made to fail), it potentially all comes crashing down. Transport is a good place to start.

1 McKinsey, 'Protecting people from a changing climate: The case for resilience,' 2021.

2 Herman Kahn, *On Thermonuclear War*, Transaction Publishers, 2007, p.78.

But the economy is far more resilient than physical infrastructure. It is “more flexible than a salamander”², according to thermonuclear specialist Herman Kahn. Just as capable of regenerating its limbs, the economy has prodigious capabilities. It will perhaps even survive being torn apart entirely. The remains of the dismembered productive apparatus, even when scattered, seem likely able to come together again to form a new ‘living’ whole. Kahn professed that, even for large cities that have been destroyed, there is always a ‘B Country’³, a land of rescue, rural America, a second chance.

Since the 1980s, this sort of thinking has been called economic survivalism. At about the same time, Midnight Notes, a radical left group that included the feminist Marxist Silvia Federici, spoke of another way. Not the deconstruction of a society based on constant threats and fear, but the possibility of something else emerging amid the rubble of economic and material destruction. Where conservatives envisioned an elasticity capable of producing resilience, Midnight Notes saw the possibility of insurrection, a freezing of the movement towards resilience – perhaps what Barker and Budor call an ‘uncontrollable rupture’, embedded in an imaginary of catastrophe.

The new fractured and regenerated whole is based on these new ideas of collapse as both an insurrectional goal and a civilisational spectre. This science is based on a pragmatic collapsology modelled after our strengths and weaknesses – in other words, directly inspired by our reckless ways of life and livelihoods. One can experience and see with their own eyes everyday excellence, or disaster, and still crucify it on a cross of its own design. That’s the hopeful side of technology. Should it inspire greatness, or intentional and emotional distance? Either way, we only live twice.

- Gianmaria Andreetta

Works in the exhibition:

Noah Barker and Dora Budor
Chase Manhattan, 2021-2022
HD video, colour, sound
10’ 32”

Sound by KVANTUM (Stefan Tcherepnin and Paul Sigerhall) and Stubborn
Courtesy of the artists

Peter Fend
Decisive Battles At Edges Of Saltwater Basins, 2019-2023
Reproductions: Digital print on matte 180g paper
Originals: Pen and colour pencil on archival paper
18 x (29.7 x 42) cm
Courtesy the artist and Cabinet, London

Special thanks to Lisa Schmitz, Wolfgang Staehle and Will Pollard.

PETER FEND STATEMENT MARCH 2023

About two-thirds of the work produced by Peter Fend or the company he founded in NY in 1980, has been confiscated, destroyed, stolen or vanished. He aims now (at 73) to live a second life, during which works and databases are either recovered or re-made. He has appeared on two publications as dead, and people believed that enough to arrange a memorial service, but any memorial or obituary, when he's finally dead, will be different. Much depends on how much he and the firm – nb. Ocean Earth – succeed. The confiscators, destroyers, thieves or, “well, it was lost in shipment,” have been a dozen ‘free world’ governments, government-funded research institutes, Big Oil, and – through extensive hacking – one enemy of the ‘free world,’ China. About China, a source of much of this work on display: they’re amazingly good in carrying out projects, but bring an empty computer and give out no photocopies.

Peter Fend has one boast: no person in the ‘art world’ or even architecture has, mainly through the company founded in 1980, caused more historical change. The MoMA says that videos it shows now “transformed the world.” At best, they changed, at the margins, our visual culture. Fend says that videos (and photos and site analyses), he or his firm produced, very much “transformed the world.” But he and the firm have scarcely started. There is much more transformation to do.

Interdictions by Big Oil occurred, usually with stated warnings, in: 2000 (Exxon), 2002 (BP), 2013 (Shell), 2019 (Equinor). The ‘free world’ assumption is that any ‘transition’ beyond fossil-fuels will be done by those companies, not by anyone (like us) with another territorial & technology paradigm. So far, China and Russia seem to follow the same path. Just where a breakaway occurs lies in a place which the ‘free world’ wants to keep out of China’s or Russia’s grip. It seems one must get in between the rival blocs.

Also,

A recitation of Fend’s art-exhibition resume chiefly proves that he paid his dues. He did all the circuits (Venice, Sharjah, Beijing, Documenta), plus Contemporary Art Daily and outlets like Buchholz, which art-critic Jason Farrago said were now “essential”. Also, more vital, he based the bulk of his work on concepts from two 20th works that Farrago said are exceptions to the usual linkage of poetry and art: La Fontaine, or Urinal, by Duchamp; Bicycle Wheel, also by Duchamp. Throw in earthworks by Smithson, Oppenheim, Heizer, De Maria, and actions like Coyote by Joseph Beuys, and a year’s experience with Gordon Matta-Clark (leading to an authoritative text), and you now see a correct resume come into focus. Only now, in a second life, we aim for far beyond. We take on Musk and Xi with their ambitions, and we do that with efforts by Russian engineers (desert works) and scientists (ocean charting).

Ocean Earth discoveries with civil-satellite data had world-authority. I’ve published scientific papers for a UNEP-FAO sponsored international conference in 1989. This led to substantial world press, then publication in a scientific book by Oxford University Press. In view of this experience, then a presentation of global planning in an exhibition sponsored by UNEP, the Director of the UNEP, Achim Steiner, gave Ocean Earth a prize. How much that means, one can argue. Is it for art or for science? The question has led to serious tussles, not least when the head of the University of Plymouth broke the ‘guidelines’ of our Art-Science grant from the Arts Council England to claim IP rights for the University, not for Ocean Earth. Fend was too timid, some say, unable to fight the claim in time; he regrets that. The head of the university was electrocuted soon after in a thunderstorm. Fend is not religious, but he made a religious statement when he heard. The tussles continue, in many countries of the ‘free world.’ Difficulty has been least, with even great encouragement, among scientists in Russia and China. What world is more ‘free’?

MAYBE THE SHOW SHOULD HAVE BEEN ENTITLED:

IN BETWEEN RUSSIA, CHINA AND ‘THE WEST’
A WAY TO PROGRESS WITH IDEAS FROM ART

I don’t want to mock James Bond.

But we can offer, for \$5,000, with \$2,000 up front, that I remake the 4-metre long panel produced for Mark Jancou Gallery in London in 1994, and destroyed the morning after the opening under orders from a man saying he was 'recruited' by MI6. The panel was a proposal for the Pripyat, Desna, Dnieper, Don, Volga and also Ural Rivers in the Ukraine-Russia-Kazakhstan region. The area has been studied in extenso since, with funding from Azerbaijan.

Collectors from Switzerland came to see that work, and were very impressed. They were shocked that it was destroyed.

Two other works in the show were destroyed under MI6 orders. One of my assistants made his MFA thesis out of that event, reproducing one of the works. The other assistant learned a very-different lesson. He decided to only be a harmless jokester. His name is Martin Creed.

As a result of such experiences, I have concluded that the West, or 'free world,' is no more free or 'democratic,' or obedient to its constitutions and laws, than Russia and China. Just differently oppressive.

In nearly all cases of 'free world' government abuse, the reason given for the violation of our property rights or standard business rights has been 'national security.'

Thus, French police at the border in Basel, on seeing the videotapes about Chernobyl based on satellite-data processing of data we purchased would subject me to questioning ALL NIGHT, standing up, the seize all the materials, justifying it as part of 'securite nationale', with 'raison d'etat,' and never return.

They participate very aggressively in the cover-up of scientific facts about Chernobyl. So too did Germany and the US.

Why justify such a police state?

We can examine the

Treaty of Paris, 1763
which organised North America by Physiocratic principles (we were already 'there', back then)

Treaty of Paris, 1783

Treaty of Tilsit, 1807
when Napoleon tried making a deal between what's now the EU and Russia herein, the seed of the biofuel proposal at the mouth of the Neman, on what was historically a Prussian-Lithuanian border

Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, 1918

Non-Aggression Pact of 1939
the stunner, for the Germans, being a declaration of war by France & the UK (the question being, Why do they care about what we in Mitteleuropa do in the East?)

Were there any treaties after WWII?

I know there was none between Russia and Japan (and I was alerted to that in a car ride from the Tokyo airport with Tojo's daughter).

The unconditional surrender of May 1945 created a legal void?

Thus, when Russia left East Germany and Germany 'reunited', there was no 'treaty' to revise or write up. So, words of assurance by the US to Gorbachov had no weight. And the West would just keep marching east, as Napoleon and Adolf did.

About North America: after the US won its Civil War, Canada decided to mimic the US. It re-structured its internal borders, which aligned with what was confirmed in the Treaty of Paris, 1763, to be of rectilinear 'provinces'. No more Hudson's Bay Basin. Nor watersheds defined Labrador with Newfoundland. The Great Lakes-St. Lawrence became curiously undefinable, which may explain why it was nearly impossible for me to get the maps, or permission, to show this hydrometric area.

Which treaties shall be enforced again?

Meantime, everyone plays nuclear games. Placing nuclear warheads in Belarus, which does not have any military role in present crisis, makes their bases not-attackable by Nato nor Ukraine.

Replacing Stoltenberg is top priority. Prior to curbing Nato, or even dissolving it, altogether. Any 'treaty' within the Nato frame is just an anti-Russia treaty. The UK never stops being obsessed with Russia, hence the use of its telephone code, 007. This explains the destruction, by UK authorities, of my proposal in 1994 for the rivers flowing south, from Russia, to the Black and Caspian (and also Aral?) Seas. No treaty or deal for that reason, and no thinking about it, is allowed? Back to the Crimean War?

I offer to make the 1994 piece for any collector or buyer.
Are they going to destroy it? again?

Peter Fend
war veteran