

L.E.F.T. TERMINAL CITY, DUBAI, UAE, detail.

blow-outs, bombings, coup d'états, collapses, crashes, destruction, dissolution, demolition, endings, erasures, encryption, fallouts, fires and floods, gyrating hurricanes, havoc, invasions, incorrect joinings, killings, liquidations, mistakes, meltdowns, natural disasters, obliterations, plans and planning, pillage, quakes, quashings, razings, recessions, sackings, shapings, treaties, unravelings, undoing, violence, wipeouts, wildfires and warheads, Xanadus lost, yesterdays, zonings, etc.

WHERE: Any and Every Conceivable Place

Once the primary condition of contingency, or following, is established, any and every conceivable place is a site of reconstruction. Depending on how it is constructed, the conceptual set of sites may or may not include places conceived of as inconceivable.

Some sites of reconstruction

1. In and out of memory
2. Across underwater and overhead transmission lines
3. Between maps, gaps, vibrations, cells
4. Throughout our cities in constant and variable transformation
5. Beyond our limits of deduction and also, possibly, induction.

WHAT: Patterns

Constructions of all scales and material, including the non-material and the immaterial, are bundles of energy in space and/or time: patterns. Reconstructions are a subset of constructions. They are constructions done again or, alternatively, are constructions after destructions. Reconstructions have a strange relationship to both their originating condition—as a copy, model, reaction, or representation—and their specific spatiotemporal or material condition, which is individual. Once formed, as a thing in the world, a reconstruction drifts further and further into singularity.

IN CONCLUSION: Buildings, bodies, swaths of cities, cultures, crimes, and histories take on lives of their own as microcosms and microcosmos, as doppelgängers, futurgängers, ubergängers, as reconstructions. They may be deceitful, blissful, humorous, oppressive, or that may just be the ways in which they are constructed.

Re-Future

DOOMSDAY DOMES

Eva Diaz

IN THE SPRING OF 1949 a course by architect Buckminster Fuller presented students at the Institute of Design in Chicago with the problem of apocalypse-cum-homework assignment: "The city is to be evacuated. All residential and industrial concentrations of 50,000 persons or more are in immediate danger of annihilation. Consumable goods now directed toward these areas will be diverted to smaller decentralized communities. Seven days are allowed in which to gather all living mechanics necessary to maintain a high standard of living for a family of six—two adults, two children, two guests. Everything not decentralized will be destroyed."

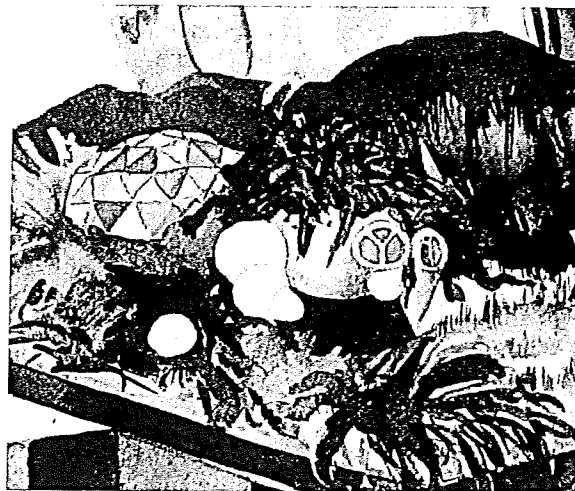
In the first decades of the twenty-first century, many artists seem galvanized by Fuller's charge, and often the works they produce appropriate Fuller's own iconic geodesic dome designs as prototypes for catastrophe shelters. Is this resurgence of domes the dawn of a new age of "outlaw design," as fans of Fuller predicted when estimating his future influence on alternative architecture in a 1997 book?

At first, I thought that in recent Fuller-inspired art projects a marked shift had taken place in twenty-first-century quotations of the geodesic dome, distinguishing them from many 1960s and '70s incarnations. The difference between then and now: gone was the frontiersman logic of Arcadian, back-to-the-land, drop-off-the-grid, atomized micro-environmentalism; gone, too, was the technological euphoria about the consumption of appropriate tools. In contrast to popular dome-building practices of the 1960s and '70s reception of Fuller, a new set of concerns seemed to come to the fore, sometimes in direct opposition to the ambitions of that earlier generation. What emerged instead was a return to issues that had been explored by politically radical collectives such as Ant Farm and Archigram, which were bent on politicizing the technocratic, libertarian logic of Fuller's theories so often rehearsed by his acolytes: sculptural structures as temporary interventions in urban sites, as kiosk production, or as shelter/information-display hybrids.

Domes were and continue to be important to artists as a form of improvised construction using recycled materials, and for their multifunctionality as pavilions and gathering places for culture and communication. At the axis of alternative architecture and of political art, artists working in this vein today speculate and experiment with a complex and often parallel set of issues: how to historicize the utopian imagination of the 1960s, and how to prototype ecological sustainability in sculptural form. These approaches concern access to shelter in a wider sociopolitical sense and question the social responsibility of the artist for connecting art in public places to matters of civic concern.

This shift in practice represents an ideological battle to uncouple Fuller from his reputation as a technocrat obsessed with recognizing universal patterns and preoccupied by the apolitical post-scarcity logic that positioned inequality as an outcome of inefficiency rather than a result of a capitalist logic of endless growth. Instead, contemporary artists seem interested in Fuller in order to highlight his advocacy of equitable resource distribution and his paradigm of architecture as information display.

Many contemporary artists and designers have used obvious references to homelessness and the unequal distribution of basic resources to the underprivileged in their work as a part of an argument against eroding the public functions of the city street, and for reinforcing public spaces as multivalenced sites in the face of neoliberalism's



Jill Newman, REFORMERS AND NEIGHBORS, detail.

tendency to privatize and limit public exchange. In Fuller's case, the kind of information housed by the dome connects various historical struggles concerning the distribution of resources. (The propaganda poster by Marjetica Potrč, appearing on page six, reads: "We are doers! The thinkers of the 60s were dreaming about us.")

The retreat from popular dome building in the 1980s had represented (yet another) rollback from the high-water mark of late 1960s utopianism, though perhaps only because this form of idealism (do-your-own-thing libertarianism) was itself a departure from the radical social justice demands of the New Left. Lloyd Kahn, one of the editors of the Fuller-inspired *Whole Earth Catalog* and the author of the influential "how-to" Domebooks series, had by 1989 repudiated the euphoric claims about domes he had once espoused. "Inspired by Buckminster Fuller to work on solving 'mankind's' housing problems," Kahn wrote, he had once proselytized for domes. But by the late 1980s he mournfully concluded, "They don't work ... Domes weren't practical, economical, or aesthetically tolerable." He hoped that in revising his previous position he could help others illuminate the continuing fascination with domes by presenting future readers with "the results of an experimental voyage ... the bitter and the sweet."

But in following Fuller's call for architecture responsive to catastrophe, are we seeing a "bitter" side of the 1960s returning to art practices today? Originally, Fuller had argued his project of dome construction was a utopian one: his articulation of "total thinking"—what he termed "comprehensive, anticipatory design science" that tests tra-

ditional artistic and architectural forms in order to teleologically progress toward a Utopia of efficiently managed resources. Probing the influence of Fuller on art practice today and understanding how his ideas of equitable resource management and holistic planning—what he termed “comprehensive design”—are received in the present will always be mediated by his reception in the 1960s and '70s. The geodesic dome was one of the rare grassroots, DIY forms of the twentieth century: in its close-to-two-decade heyday from the 1960s to the early '80s, it was appropriated as an easy-to-build, cheap modern alternative to traditional values, both social and architectural.

Now, as geodesic domes are once again returned to public consciousness, this time almost exclusively in the work of contemporary artists, it seems crucial to ask why. For in recent years there is a sense of the dome as an exemplar of a new art of utopian public sculpture that uses the dome more neutrally as an architecture of gathering places. Recent works seem to consider the political implications of shelter design as a topic of critical importance for artists by proposing nearly functional, yet ultimately quite farcical, prototypes of rolling domes or clumsy walking shelters, for example.

Yet disquieting elements of the recent works by contemporary artists color a too-rosy interpretation of contemporary dome works as a new form of idealistic political art and urban intervention. Artists now return to Fuller for his Cassandra-like call to ecological responsibility. Domes are seen as dystopian architecture, spaces to begin society anew under threats of being rent by conflict and scarcity, and as a means to rescue the planet from bad stewardship, over-consumption, and waste. Not to imply a causal relationship, but several factors seem important in considering this shift to a more pessimistic reception of Fuller. They include the calamitous political and infrastructural failure in the wake of Hurricane Katrina in 2005 and the ongoing housing crisis in the New Orleans region; the related problem of the increasing scientific evidence for and ineffective legislative response to global warming; and the near-total privatization of once collectively owned natural resources that further troubles the feasibility of post-scarcity arguments.

Another side of Fuller has crept in: an urgency about nomadism in which improvised, off-the-grid shelters may become unavoidable features of a coming post-apocalyptic world. (This was evident even in Fuller and Shoji Sadao's 1960 proposal to skin midtown Manhattan with a plastic

dome, ostensibly to provide a controlled climate to economize snow-removal costs, but with an unavoidable implication that the dome could provide protection from nuclear fallout.) A sense of ecological catastrophe, both regional and global, permeates artists' works today, as though the construction of alternative architectural forms such as domes becomes a prototyping technique for generating forms of emergency shelter.

TechnoSustainable

TECHNO-SUSTAINABLE

—
Stephen Hren

IT WAS IN OUTER SPACE that we first started harvesting electricity from the sun, powering telescopes that peered into the mysteries of faraway planets and moons. Out there on satellites that whiz by at thousands of miles an hour, blinking in the night sky, we began our first attempts at powering ourselves with sustainable sources. Images from space allowed us to see our tiny planet as a floating island, self-contained yet delicate and fragile.

We build everything with the knowledge that it will one day collapse, crumble back into its constituent parts, return to the earth from whence it came. Yet our solar system contains huge quantities of rock, metal, and gas. The sun explodes with energy, a hydrogen bomb every second, potentially powering infinitely complex systems.

Now we are busy screwing and overpopulating, consuming and discarding, eating and making “waste,” a concept the universe had probably never encountered before our industrial civilization. Are collapse and a return to the caves inevitable? Are we doomed to scavenge like swine among the ruins, our great towers and highways an unsolvable mystery?

If everything rots, then all that matters is how well we design, how well we build, and how well we maintain. We have within us the life force, a more potent force than all the stars combined. For while stars like our sun burn up, life takes raw materials and creates new life, increasing in number and complexity, capable of spreading itself from planet to planet and from solar system to solar system.

ARCHITECTURAL INVENTIONS

VISIONARY DRAWINGS

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