

PAST IMPERFECT...

MASTERS OF REALITY

Steve Rushton

ELVIS MEETS NIXON

ATOMIC
SCULPTURES

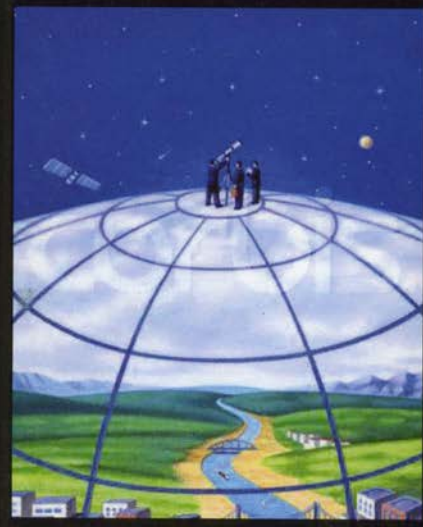
BIOSPHERE

WIGLEY ON M^CHALE

CASCO ISSUES N99

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MASTERS OF REALITY



¹The leader's name was Don Fernando de Guzman. He took over the expedition following the murder, organised by Lope de Aguirre, of its leader Pedro de Urza. De Guzman signed a document which authenticated the regime change and gave himself the fanciful title of 'General of El Derado and Omagua'. Aguirre, as putative maestro de campo, signed himself as 'Lope de Aguirre, traitor'. Like Don Fernando, Aguirre was fond of hyperbolic titles, also calling himself: 'Lope de Aguirre, Wrath of God, Prince of Freedom, King of Tierra Firme.' As Aguirre reached the end of his murderous passage up the Amazon, killing or marooning 150 of the 370 Europeans on the expedition, he became disillusioned: 'There is nothing on the river but despair'. After reaching the Atlantic Ocean on 4th July 1561 Aguirre began ransacking the coast of Venezuela. He was killed on the 9th January 1562, just before strangling his own daughter to prevent her from falling into enemy hands.

THE CREATURE IN THE MAP,
Charles Nicholl, Vintage Press, 1996

In Werner Herzog's film *AGUIRRE THE WRATH OF GOD* a group of adventurers drift up the Amazon in search of El Dorado. Their leader, sat at the prow of the raft on a makeshift throne, gives a name to each of the territories they pass through. He is lost in an ecstasy of naming; it is as if to name a space is enough to take possession of it and that by speaking the territory into existence he will somehow make an inchoate thing real.¹

It's a pathetic moment in the film because we know that the explorers are drifting to their deaths and that the goal, El Dorado, is a fantasy. It is a parable of human folly but it also tells us something about the radical nature of naming. We know that names can fall into extinction, or fail to graft onto the body of their referent.

The leader was 'speech-acting', of course, playing with the possibility of making Siamese twins out of the name and the thing it names and also playing the whimsy that before a thing is named it does not exist. Or maybe he was just terrified of

the void that opened up in front of him and his only shield against it was to speak his own improvised dreamtime; in which case we can read it as a fable of solipsism—a man alone in his imaginary world with his imaginary friends and enemies. Nevertheless it was the current and flow of the promise of the land of gold that drew Aguirre's conquistadors through the Amazon, and perhaps it was the illusion of promised mastery that caused their leader to baptise the world unfolding before him.

ii



In HOW TO DO THINGS WITH WORDS philosopher J.L. Austin distinguishes between constative utterances, which can be deemed true or false and which describe a state of affairs (like our old favourite 'the cat sat on the mat') and performatives, which are neither true or false but which through their utterance perform an action (or, more precisely, the utterance is the action). When, during a wedding service, the bride says: 'I do' she does not report on the marriage but rather performs the act of marriage. This promise is dependent on a series of conditions surrounding the utterance (including, in the case of the wedding, the presence of a priest, the 'script' of the service and the agreement by all parties involved that they, indeed, do).

2 HOW TO DO THINGS WITH WORDS,
J.L. Austin, 1975

It is these conditions that make the utterance either felicitous (appropriate/secure/happy) or infelicitous (inappropriate/insecure/unhappy)². This is all fine as long as the performative is in the first person and the present indicative (I do, I will, I promise) and as long as the conditions that regulate a felicitous performative are in place.

But why can't other statements be regarded as performative? If, for instance, I uttered the implicit performative (excluding the first person and the present indicative) 'We will meet tomorrow' and the meeting did take place then the constative utterance that describes the state of affairs of us meeting tomorrow can be regarded as performative, because the action of speaking spoke the meeting into existence³. The utterance here becomes hinged, swinging between the constative and the performative and Austin's initial argument goes into reverse. Rather than performatives being a particular type of constative (if pseudo statements which are neither true or false) constatives now become a type of performative⁴.

3 Michel Foucault, in THE ARCHEOLOGY OF KNOWLEDGE, 1969 introduces the term 'enoncé' as that element which makes propositions, utterances and speech acts meaningful. This streamlines Austin's lexicon of terms ('illocutionary', 'locutionary', 'perlocutionary') and focuses on the power of the 'enunciative' which has its effect irrespective of any grammatical, syntactical or logical niceties. Foucault then examines the principles of meaning production in various discursive formations.

4 Jonathan Culler, PHILOSOPHY AND LITERATURE: THE FORTUNES OF THE PERFORMATIVE. Poetics Today 21:3, Fall 2000

So, to what extent can the following sentence be understood as performative? 'A group of adventurers drift up the Amazon in search of El Dorado, their leader, sat at the prow of the raft on a makeshift throne, gives a name to each of the territories they pass through.' What action just took place? We were introduced to a character who was performing an action (naming) but in so doing he was also creating a territory in which the concept of naming was performed. Here again the constative (plagued by aporias) cannot hold out against the demands of the performative and folds into the perlocutionary, performing an action within our imagination.

And now all statements seem to be sucked in by the gravity of the performative, as the truth or falsity of a statement are subordinate to whether or not it is felicitous. In a work of literature the performative becomes felicitous simply when it accords to the condition of being written, read and published, its truth or falsity are pushed aside in preference for its ability to perform within a series of conditions which 'make it so'. In this case everything is performative.

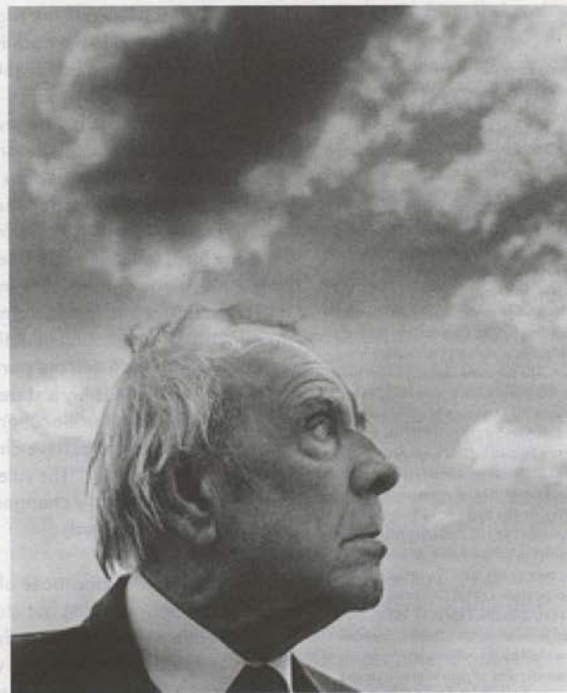
I'm describing a hole hollowed out by an utterance that is simultaneously filled in by its performance, and it is also the hole around a very apt allegory. In TLON, UQBAR, ORBIS TERTIUS by Jorge Luis Borges a group of individuals set about creating an invented country called Uqbar. They insert a number of pages about the country into a real encyclopaedia, where it burns like

a slow fuse, eventually entering the consciousness of people as a real place. The project is expanded into the construction of an entire planet. In the end the narrator encounters artefacts from the planet Tlon, some cones made of an unfamiliar metal, which are small but incredibly heavy. These cones, with the diameter of a button, make a deep indentation in the skin of his palm. Tlon has taken on a real substance and the narrator warns us that soon 'the world will be Tlon'. We can take this as an allegory of how a statement can have a performative reality effect. T L O N , U Q B A R , O R B I S T E R T I U S is a story within a story. The fiction of Tlon is situated within a story in which Tlon becomes real, but crucially, in the story at least, Tlon is constituted through the telling. The story of Tlon runs along the seam at which literature and the performative reality effect meet, this is the site of the act of inauguration. But what have stories, even stories in which the story becomes real, got to do with reality?

Derrida has observed that 'political constitutions have a discursive regime identical to that of the constitution of literary structures'. The promise of the political manifesto is not only to declare a series of intentions in the abstract but also to bring about the conditions to which it refers, in the same way a declaration of independence, although essentially a literary construct, aims to inaugurate change. In the act of inauguration we see again the paradoxical play between the constative and the performative, between what is stated and what is done. And this is the essence of the paradox: 'The only way to claim that language functions performatively to shape the world' writes Jonathan Culler, 'is to do so through a constative, such as "Language shapes the world".'⁵

5 ibid.

iii



6 George W Bush, 20th September 2001, speech to both houses of Congress.

7 The statement performs the function of demarcating sides despite its failure to define who 'us' or the 'terrorists' are.

8 In HOW TO DO THINGS WITH WORDS, Austin cites locution: 'I say x' and illocutionary: 'In saying x, I was y-ing' For instance the statement 'everything will be fine' also performs the illocutionary act of consoling—this is how, 'In saying x, I was y-ing'. Note: if one successfully performs a perlocution, one also succeeds in performing both an illocution and a locution.

We all know that words sail under flags of convenience, someone might say: 'Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make: either you are with us or you are with the terrorists.'⁶ And we kind of understand what is going on here, we understand that we are being fobbed off with a false dichotomy—the phrase 'not with us' doesn't cover who we are with, or in fact whether we are with anyone—it's a classic case of the excluded middle—but nevertheless, although the statement is logically invalid it is still effective. The statement is an ideological statement that disguises its focalising function of placing us on one side or another; despite its failure to be logical,⁷ it nevertheless constitutes what Austin would call an 'illocutionary act'⁸.

Paul Keeling, who provides a useful analysis of the above statement in relation to Austin's speech act theory, asks: 'does the statement have truth conditions? If someone with a gun says "(either) put up your hands, or else!" the response "that's not true" would seem to be odd. It's very difficult to "contradict" a threat.'

9 For a more detailed analysis of the particular statement see Paul Keeling *THE BUSH DISJUNCTURE*, Philosophy Now Issue 52, August/September 2005 pp. 29-31

10 A British intelligence memo outlining a meeting between the head of British intelligence and the prime minister, and sent almost eight months before the Iraqi war, stated: 'The intelligence and facts were being fixed around the policy'. Cited in *THE SECRET WAY TO WAR*, THE NEW YORK REVIEW, 9th June, 2005

11 There were numerous reports (even according to Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, General Peter Pierce there have been 300 separate reports) which found that the tortures were systematic, see for instance the TAGUBA REPORT, ARTICLE 15-6 INVESTIGATION OF THE 800TH MILITARY POLICE BRIGADE: 'This systematic and illegal abuse was intentionally perpetrated.'

Also, REPORT OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS (ICRC) ON THE TREATMENT BY THE COALITION FORCES OF PRISONERS OF WAR AND OTHER PROTECTED PERSONS BY THE GENEVA CONVENTIONS IN IRAQ DURING ARREST, INTERNMENT AND INTERROGATION, February 2004:

'...physical and psychological coercion were used by the military intelligence in a systematic way to gain confessions and extract information...' Both collected in *TORTURE AND TRUTH AMERICA, ABU GHERAIB AND THE WAR ON TERROR*.

Donald Rumsfeld's response to questions regarding these reports involved a deft piece of speech acting:

Rumsfeld: 'Have you seen one [report] that characterized it [the torture at Abu Gheraib] as systematic or systemic?'

General Pierce: 'No Sir.'

Rumsfeld: 'I haven't either.'

Reporter: 'What about-?'

Rumsfeld: 'Question?'

DEFENCE DEPARTMENT BRIEFING, 29th March, 2005

Mr Rumsfeld was equally cavalier over the absence of WMD, reaching prize winning heights of sophistry with the statement: 'The absence of evidence is not the evidence of absence.' In, Steve Rushton, *CLOAK & DAGGER, DOT DOT DOT*, issue 8, 2005

Recent political discourse, in the course of fashioning the new grand narrative of 'the war on terror', is littered with proclamations that effectively pull the rug from under the very idea of the social contract and leave traditional political critique frozen in the glare of oncoming headlights⁹.

And such an outcome is, I believe, intended. A central characteristic of recent political rhetoric—from the day-to-day 'spin', to the declaration that weapons of mass destruction exist¹⁰, or in the barefaced assertion that the torture at Abu Ghraib was not systematic¹¹ — is its performative nature.

Tony Blair, following the tube and bus bombings on the 7th July 2005, made another statement that swings on the hinge of the constative and the performative: 'The rules have changed' has the tripartite function of acting as a statement of fact, a declaration of intention and the performance of an action: The 'locutionary act', ostensibly a statement of fact: 'the rules have changed' disguises the illocutionary act: 'the rules have changed [because I say "the rules have changed"].' which in turn performs the perlocutionary act: 'The rules have changed.' To recap: in saying X (the rules have changed) he was actually performing Y (the rules have changed).

The frustrating thing for those of us old fashioned enough to require not only meaning but also sense from the declarations of our politicians is, of course, that any number of statements which are palpably untrue, and which, after numerous enquires, have proved to be so (the existence of WMD, the systematic torture of prisoners in the custody of the U.S Military) still have an effect and shape the political agenda. For political analyst Mark Danner the moment after 9/11 can be distinguished as 'the end of the narrative of scandal'; in a topsy-turvy world where those who should have been punished have been rewarded some of us get the impression that the ship has taken to the tide without us. We know that the new political reality is eerily out of register with what we know to be the case, and we also know that although political reality is no longer accountable to us, we are becoming increasingly accountable to it. This much is made apparent by an off the record comment made by a Bush aide to Ron Suskin of *THE NEW YORK TIMES MAGAZINE*:

'The aide said that guys like me were "in what we call the reality-based community," which he defined as people who "believe that solutions emerge from your judicious study of discernible reality." I nodded and murmured something about enlightenment principles and empiricism. He cut me off.

12 See Ron Suskind, *WITHOUT A DOUBT*, The New York Times Magazine, 17th October, 2004.

13 Peggy Phelan, *HINCKLEY AND RONALD REAGAN: REENACTMENT AND THE ETHICS OF THE REAL, IN LIFE ONCE MORE*, Witte de With, Rotterdam, 2005 p 155

14 Ibid p147

15 Ibid. p 167

"That's not the way the world really works anymore," he continued. "We're an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality. And while you're studying that reality—judiciously, as you will—we'll act again, creating other new realities, which you can study too, and that's how things will sort out. We're history's actors...and you, all of you, will be left to just study what we do."¹²

In my imagination I hear the manic laugh of a Bond villain. The statement is so hubristic as to seem somehow phoney. I think it's the repetition that provides the melodramatic effect: '... and you, all of you...' could be taken from that familiar moment in a Bond film when the dastardly Ernst Stavro Blofeld tells 007 (who is dangling over a shark pit) every detail of his plan to take over the world. But we shouldn't dismiss the quote merely because of its wild-eyed improbability—we are haunted by the nagging suspicion that it is only because we recognise such speeches in fiction that we recognise them as 'real'. We sense that the script of political reality has been taking a sharp turn towards fiction for some time, and that furthermore our own relationship to political life is, as a consequence, suffering from what the Americans might call 'a disconnect'. Peggy Phelan has written eloquently about how Ronald Reagan lived in a world of citation, how he was compelled to provide a second-hand witticism to perform the presentation of his public persona. After a failed assassination attempt by the *TAXI DRIVER* obsessed John Hinckley in 1981 Reagan paraphrased the boxer George Tunner, saying to his wife Nancy: 'Honey, I should have ducked.' When the medical staff asked how he felt, following the operation that dragged him back into world of the living, he quoted W.C. Fields: 'All in all I'd rather be in Philadelphia.'¹³

It was through the re-enactment of pat phrases that the subject of President Reagan could reconstruct himself after the trauma of the attack; it was through the cutting and pasting from his Hollywood database that he could edit himself back into reality. In the performance based society actions are quoted, performed and re-enacted in order to construct the fiction of the self; Reagan, in a pre-recorded speech to the audience of the Academy Awards of 1981 illustrated how comfortable he was with this state of affairs: 'It is the motion picture that shows us not only how to look and sound but also how to feel'.¹⁴ Years later, Arnold Schwarzenegger's team, running for the Governorship of California, vowed to 'terminate' the opposition.¹⁵ And we wait; our shoulders hunched in embarrassed anticipation, for the promissory 'I'll be back!' to be repeated

during the next election. In my imagination I can pre-enact the cheers that follow, the cheers and yelps particular to American political rallies, I can see the balloons, the placards and streamers, the long shot of Arnie cross-fading to a close up of his defiant face—it's almost as if it's already happened.



Time may prove that the 'speech acting' of the era after 9/11 was no more substantial than the phantasmagorical dream-world generated by the conquistador who, perched on the prow of Aguirre's boat, spoke a new political landscape into existence—a landscape that disappeared in the time it took to name it. Perhaps, in due course, the current era of incantations will pass into a dark memory, along with the other paranoid moments in history where an assassin lurked in every camp. For the time being we can console ourselves with other tales of hubris, like the one about Bellerophon, the mortal who planned to fly

to Mount Olympus on the back of Pegasus. Even the mighty winged horse found the flight to the realm of the gods exhausting, and as Bellerophon's steed struggled to gain height he was stung by an agent sent by the gods—a fly. The fly's tiny bite caused the horse to rear and Bellerophon to fall. In stories it often ends badly for those who mock the gods, but after all it's only a story, it somehow lacks the potency of a spell.

Steve Rushton

ELVIS MEETS NIXON

In December 1970 Elvis and president Nixon had a correspondence, they were in 'dialogue' so to speak. Elvis wrote Nixon a letter saying how much he admired the president, and he wanted to help to save the country. He offered his services as a Federal Agent in the field of drug abuse and communist 'brainwashing techniques'. He also gave the president a personal present, a Colt 45 from World War II. www.archives.gov/exhibit_hall/when_nixon_met_elvis/

American Airlines

Subject:

Name:

Location:

Dear Mr. President
First I would like to introduce myself
I am Elvis Presley and advise you
and How about Present for you
office I talked to Vice President
Agnew in Palm Springs 2 weeks that
expressed my concern for our country
The Drug Culture, the Hippie Elements,
The SDS, Black Panthers, etc. do not
consider me as their enemy or as they
call it the establishment. I called
president

Dear Mr. President:

First, I would like to introduce myself. I am Elvis Presley and admire you and have great respect for your office. I talked to Vice President Agnew in Palm Springs three weeks ago and expressed my concern for our country. The drug culture, the hippie elements, the SDS, Black Panthers, etc. do not consider me as their enemy or as they call it the establishment. I call it American and I love it. Sir, I can and will be of any service that I can to help the country out. I have no concerns or motives other than helping the country out. So I wish not to be given a title or an appointed position. I can and will do more good if I were made a Federal Agent at Large and I will help out by doing it my way through my communications with people of all ages. First and foremost, I am an entertainer, but all I need is the Federal credentials. I am on this plane with Senator George Murphy and we have been discussing the problems that our country is faced with.

Sir, I am staying at the Washington Hotel, Room: 505 - 506-507. I have two men who work with me by the name of Jerry Schilling and Sonny West. I am registered under the name of Don Burrows. I will be here for as long as it takes to get the credentials of a Federal Agent. I have done an in-depth study of drug abuse and Communist brainwashing techniques and I am right in the middle of the whole thing where I can and will do the most good.

I am glad to help just so long as it is kept very private. You can have your staff or whomever call me anytime today, tonight, or tomorrow. I was nominated this coming year one of America's Ten Most Outstanding Young Men. That will be in January 18 in my home town of Memphis, Tennessee. I am sending you the short autobiography about myself so you can better understand this approach. I would love to meet you just to say hello if you're not too busy.

Respectfully,

/s/ Elvis Presley

P.S. I believe that you, Sir, were one of the Top Ten Outstanding Men of America Also.

I have a personal gift for you which I would like to present to you and you can accept it or I will keep it for you until you can take it.

ATOMIC SCULPTURES

Artist Tony Price (1937-2000) created 'atomic art'. With machine parts discarded by the nuclear weapons programs at Los Alamos National Laboratory, Price made figurative sculptures, often based on figures from spiritual and religious traditions. His admirers consider him 'a modern-day alchemist who transformed the technology of death into works of art and capacitors for thought.'

from: BEAUTY FROM THE BEAST, by Teri Randall. THE NEW MEXICAN, PASATIEMPO THE ATOMIC ART OF TONY PRICE, 8/5/04 <http://newartsworld.com/atomicartist/newpress5enl.html>



BIOSPHERE

A few hundred miles further from Trinity site, is Biosphere 2, a manmade closed ecological system in Oracle, Arizona, built by Edward P. Bass, Space Biosphere Ventures and others. Constructed in the late eighties of the 20th century, this artificial, experimental world was used to test if and how people could live and study in a closed biosphere. It explored the possible use of closed biospheres in space colonization, and also allowed the study and manipulation of a biosphere without harming Earth. Biosphere 2 is modeled on Biosphere 1: Earth.

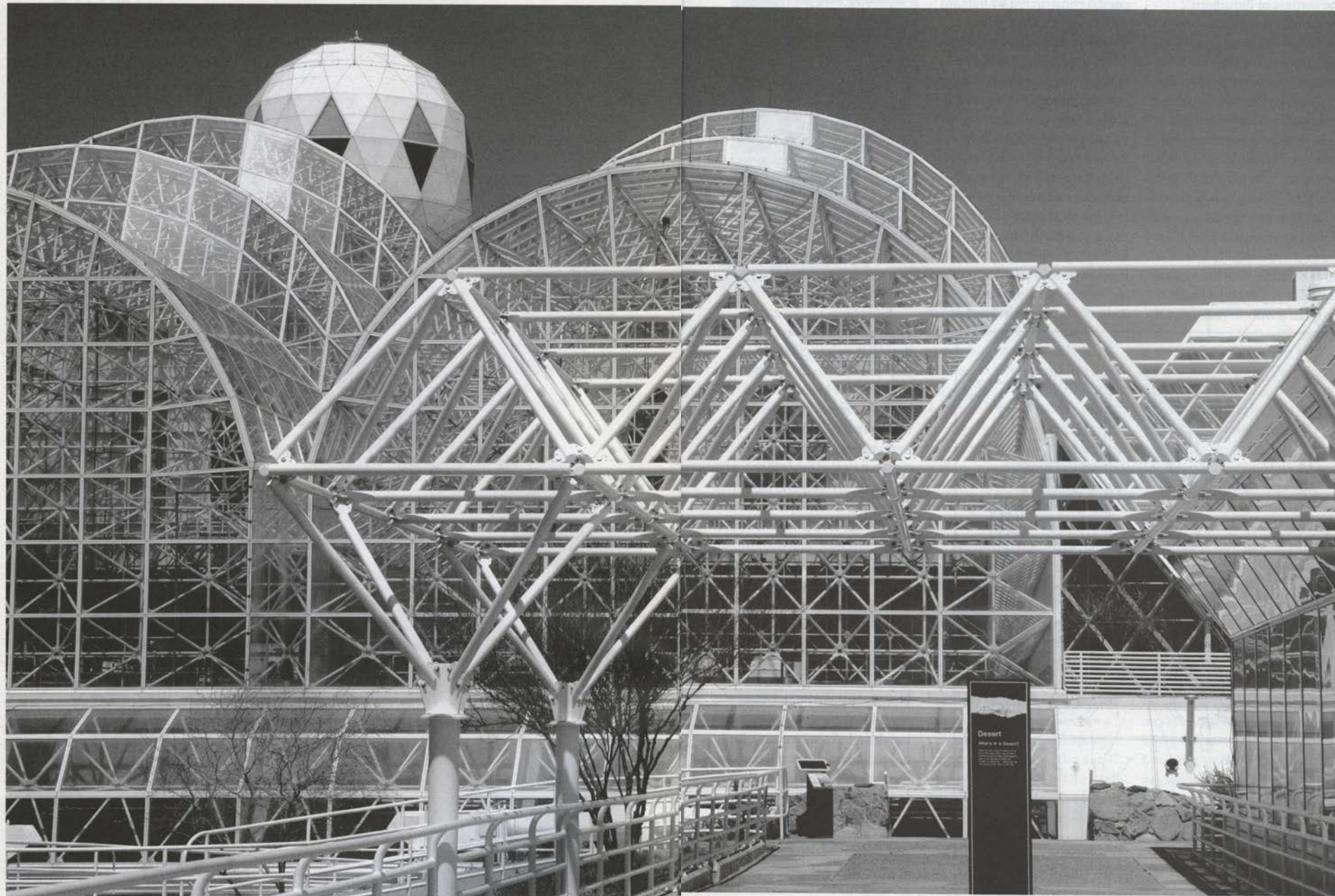
The physical structure of Biosphere 2 is made of steel tubing and high-performance glass and steel frames. The frame and glazing materials were designed and made to specifications by a firm run by a one-time student of Buckminster Fuller, Peter Pearce. The project conducted two sealed missions; the first from September 26th 1991 to September 26th 1993, and the second for six months in 1994. During the first mission, oxygen fell while carbon dioxide levels rose. Oxygen and other supplies were provided, and the project lost some credibility.



Since 1996, Biosphere 2 is open to others: students of Columbia University and M.I.T., for example, have spent a year in the Biosphere 2 Center.



Tony Price



The owners of Biosphere 2 announced last January that the Biosphere 2 campus is for sale. They would prefer if a research use was found for the complex, but are also looking for buyers with different intentions, such as universities, churches, resorts, etc. Wouldn't it in fact be an interesting location for an artists' residency program?

An interesting consequence of the experiment is that it showed the difficulty of emulating the functions of the natural capital of the evolved Earth biosphere with infrastructural

capital constructed by humans with present technology. Despite expenditure of over \$150 million, this attempt to make a new biosphere did not sustain eight humans for a limited time, while the original sustains billions of humans. Some economists have used the price of the Biosphere 2 project as an attempt to calculate the total value of all natural capital on Earth. According to them, given that it does at least as good a job at sustaining humans as Biosphere 2, it should be worth at least as



much per resident. This leads to a rather large, but finite, price of the Earth itself.

Biosphere 2 is the exact opposite of the Trinity site, though they bare similarities. Both are tourist sites, for those who know or heard about it. We knew about Biosphere through mythic stories in—perhaps—the NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC and other media. Both Trinity and Biosphere are driven by a vision on the future. Fear for this future is, in both cases, one of these drives, and both experiments deal with the concept of a world that may, or may not, become unlivable. The knowledge gathered at Trinity site is derived from experiments and its results are destructive. Biosphere 2 did not manage to really construct a self-sustaining closed of environment. Both are experimental, and imperfect, but still, there is something brewing, a potentiality... something that is willing or not willing, possible. partly based on: WIKIPEDIA, the free encyclopedia. drawing: Bik Van der Pol



Mindfully.org

The above photo looks more like Beverly Crusher and Jean-Luc Picard of the starship Enterprise in the TV show Star Trek than members of a team that is in a quest to learn about life.

WIGLEY ON MCHALE



"an artificial body that reflects the world of infra-grilled steak, premixed cake, dream kitchens, dream cars, machine tools, power mixers, parkways, ticket tapes, sparkplugs and electronics." John McHale, MACHINE MADE AMERICA, ARCHITECTURE DESIGN, 1957

'John McHale is fascinated by the prosthetic attachment of artificial limbs. Though these attachments are usually made in response to some kind of human defect (through birth, degenerate disease or amputation), they are capable of much further amplification, an amplification and diversification of the human organism that offers a general model of cultural production and restructuring. When he presents a whole succession of prosthetic attachments, each is understood as a model for the enhancement of the human condition. To accessorise and extend the body is not to simply attach prosthetic limbs to the outside of the body or to place bodies inside a prosthetic apparatus.

It also means passing that apparatus right into the internal nervous system and letting the nervous system control it, letting the machinery of the body interact with the machinery that is outside it, producing a new kind of super body. Accessorised man as superman. The limit between interior and exterior, organic and machine, gives way. The inevitable consequence is the 'extension,' as McHale puts it, of the control capacities of the human nervous system into electro-mechanical devices which in turn grow into a generalised cybernetic system. In fact, he says that it is precisely by generalising this cybernetic extension of the human nervous system into a model for all technology that technology will be transformed into an organic system. Ecologists will no longer simply talk about plant life, mineral deposits, atmospheric conditions, and so on. Everything that we think of as artificial would be addressed as the new nature, the artificial nature that needs to be analysed and reconfigured in ecological terms. The implication of McHale's argument is that the artificial body becomes the natural landscape, the space that people inhabit. The successive extensions of the body transform the space the body occupies. Indeed, it collapses the distinction between body and space. The new global space is that of the artificial

body. The global ecological space whose energy flows require management is produced by hyperextended flows of nervous energy.

If you look at McHale's thinking throughout this time, it is essentially a reworking of the program that Buckminster Fuller outlined in the UIA speech. In fact, the World Resources Inventory was basically the institution that promoted and published Fuller's ideas for a while. It is not by chance that the 2000+ issue of ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN begins with a transcript of a speech by Buckminster Fuller. The series of documents of which it was originally part is largely made up of the writings of Buckminster Fuller and John McHale. It was McHale who wrote the first monograph on Fuller in 1962, and his writing is everywhere completely entangled with that of Fuller, who he describes as 'Research Associate'. If you read Fuller's writing at the same time, he has exactly the same attitude towards McHale. They never sign together or fully acknowledge the other, despite the fact that they seem to be saying the same thing and even using the same charts. It often becomes unclear who is writing what.'

from RECYCLING RECYCLING, lecture by Mark Wigley <http://www.architecture.auckland.ac.nz/publications/interstices/i4/THEHTML/keynotes/wigley/front.htm>



Buckminster Fuller supervising the first airlift delivery of U.S. Marine Corps shelter in 1954.

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PAST IMPERFECT

PAST IMPERFECT explores the relations between the radical output of the conceptual art of the 1960s and 1970s and everyday life, gradually moving on to include how radical ideas from the past are linked to those of today. In all corners of life—politics, literature, intelligence, science—radical actions, even if they seem to have disappeared into oblivion, influence and shape the public arena.

This publication is the result of a research, intensely guided by curiosity, amazement and suspicion, accepting the risk of being totally incomplete or overly thorough. PAST IMPERFECT searches for hidden pasts by lifting stones and poking underneath; collecting cases around notions on disappearance (persons, information), perfection, excessive control, compulsion and withdrawal—as varied as causal developments (Ford boxes), state fiction and ambiguity (Absolut), coincidental histories (from aubergines to Hotel Angst), preservation and destruction (from Amanda Lear to Howard Hughes), dark politics (Elvis meeting Nixon), the haunting of artifacts and economical speculation (Corbis), erasure (from Alfred Loos' archives to Willem de Kooning's drawings), protection (Walden's utopia), the impossible made possible (Houdini), ... and much more.

Lisette Smits & Bik Van der Pol, ed.

