of politics itself, his speech collapses past, future, and present as the ghost of politics past reports on the significance of what is about to happen.

"Today, there stand before us two media matadors, brave young men from Ant Farm who are about to go forth into the unknown, and let me say this, these artists are pioneers, as surly as Louis and Clark when they explored uncharted territory, they are pioneers as surly as Armstrong and Aldrin when they set foot on the moon . . . "

Ant Farm's Chip Lord, speaking on the subject of *Media Burn* in 2002, cited Michael Shamberg's seminal book *Guerrilla Television* (1971), which inspired various initiatives combining the collectivist ideals of the 1960s with the potentially democratizing (new) technologies of video, closed-circuit TV, and cable of the 1970s: "[Using TV to destroy TV] was consistent with the *Guerrilla Television* position, to destroy the monopoly of centralized television. There was a lot of rhetoric about how cable TV was going to democratize production."

Ant Farm's media critique can be understood as a critical response to the promise of video, and perhaps more than any other artists they articulated its contradictions. Released from the monopoly of the networks and accessed by ordinary citizens, the Portapak video camera promised personal and social empowerment — make your own social and technological networks, make and distribute your own programs, construct your own social software, democratize artistic practice. But, as we will see in subsequent issues of *How Media Masters Reality*, the values of self-empowerment could easily be accommodated within a media feedback system in which our performance becomes not only a commodity that we sell to ourselves, but also a means by which the media could narrativize and legitimize itself.

In 1962, Daniel Boorstin coined the term "pseudo-event" to describe events designed solely to be reported: presidential debates, press conferences (and media burns). But Andy Warhol understood better than anyone else that the media event isn't something you simply consume. Describing the unfolding hallucination of the factory, Warhol said, "They came to see who came." The people who come to see the party become the party, the figure and ground become a single flowing image. In the same way, the figure and ground of the press shifts backwards and forwards from the press as they arrive to report the event and to the press as their bodies provide the props for the event. In the next installment of this series we will look at why we, as performers in the media feedback loop, are losing the script and picking up the format. (SR) ■

ICONS GOVERN ACTION

MANHATTAN — "There is nothing funny about the urinal," Peter Fend insists. Perhaps not. Nor is there anything particularly funny about the deteriorating state of our global ecosystem. Nevertheless, several hundred otherwise sober attendees at a recent summit held at the New York Public Library laughed heartily as Fend showed a sequence of Powerpoint (TM) slides leading directly from Marcel Duchamp's iconic urinal, *Fountain*, through Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty*, to a drawing of the globe in which the world's oceans appear to be spiraling down the tubes.

Fend was on his way to Germany from New Zealand, where he divides his time, with a stopover of a few days in New York to appear at the summit. There, he was allotted seven minutes to present the work of Ocean Earth, the corporation he founded in 1980, which has been the focus of his considerable energies for the last thirty years. Fend cited Duchamp's *Fountain* to illustrate what he sees as the profound influence of icons in the development of political and social institutions: "Icons govern action. The urinal, like Morton Shamberg's *God*, which is just a piece of plumbing, governs subsequent action. Throughout much of western culture, the notion of the state has been embodied in the leader, the hero, the standing figure. If

an icon is terrain, or surroundings, instead of a role model or hero, then it causes a different orientation of social activity — we come to see the ideal as our surroundings, not a leader. The surroundings are whatever bowl we happen to be in."

For Fend, Duchamp's *Fountain*, albeit a urinal on a pedestal, is the obvious metaphor to effectively lead society in the direction of topological priorities, toward a radical reorientation of values. While his audience may be laughing, Fend is not. He is taking it all quite literally, and he has a point. After all, if wars are fought over imaginary lines, then icons — the images we project onto the world — would seem to govern action, indeed.

Ocean Earth was formed by Fend in partnership with fellow artists Colen Fitzgibbon, Jenny Holzer, Peter Nadin, Richard Prince, and Robin Winters as the legal entity *Ocean Earth Construction and Development Corporation.* Over three decades, the company's trajectory has extended from satellite imagery and media programming to the development of alternative energy resources and a nationwide school curriculum with a hands-on pedagogical agenda for sustainable ecology. According to the 1981 Corporate Statement, "Ocean Earth Construction and Development Corporation develops regional plansand other architectural programs that promote those means of energy production which in no way contribute to ecological breakdown of the planet." Instead, Ocean Earth would pursue development of solar-generated energy in a variety of forms, including sea-based biomass, degradable chiefly to methane — the project to which Fend and Ocean Earth are primarily dedicated today, and which is in pilot development for the exhibition *Ruhr 2010*.

To be clear, Ocean Earth, by Fend's own account, is an architectural firm that only happens to "use art ideas and arise from art practices." It is a corporation formed by artists, built on the legacy of Gordon Matta-Clark and others who embraced unconventional architectural practices, envisioning the reorganization of physical space according to ecological priorities. In a culture in which contemporary art practice is often oriented towards observation and critique, and art quietly, if disdainfully, seats itself somewhere towards the back of the academic or the media-entertainment bus, Fend makes an extraordinary claim for art, which resonates with his take on *Fountain.* As Fend puts it, "Art is the best way to approach the problem [of ecological production] because it is a modeling of what the material values are."

Since its inception, Ocean Earth has initiated a variety of projects using technological means to see and render landscape and potential energy resources in unorthodox ways. The group developed a television program with Paul Sharits in 1981 called Space Force, which — in the spirit of Stewart Brand or Buckminster Fuller, though with a decidedly darker tone — was intended to disseminate information from satellite observation of the earth to the public in order to "show the public what endangers it, be that pollution, soil exhaustion, mineral depletion, climactic changes, or hostile military preparations. *Space Force* exposes the public safety dangers to public view, with state-of-art advances in video and film, in photography and television, most dramatically and most instantaneously on television."

The extension of Ocean Earth's ventures into mass media reflects Fend's belief that "media is essentially territorial," and therefore an aspect of architecture. In the 1980s, using publicly-available satellite imagery captured by Landsat, a U.S. civilian satellite, members of Ocean Earth worked with NASA experts to analyze these images and thus produce commercially-viable information which they then sold to major news organizations, including NBC and the BBC. Although the civilian satellite images were of inferior resolution to more sophisticated military satellites, weather permitting, Ocean Earth could see enough to identify air bases and troop movements in hot spots of conflict, including Libya and the Falklands. In the context of the Cold War, the market for images of war zones was greater than that for prospective project sites related to conservation, ecology and land use.

By the end of the 1980s, most of Ocean Earth's founders and early collaborators, including artists Dennis Oppenheim, Paul Sharits, Wolfgang Staehle, Kirsten Mosher, and Taro Suzuki had moved onto other pursuits.

Meanwhile, Ocean Earth renewed its energy-focused work. In 1994, a proposal to begin methane production from algae extraction and fermentation in Wellington, New Zealand, which had been many years in development, fell through. Subsequently, Heidi Mardon, a New Zealander who had been a spearhead in the Wellington project, turned to the public school system, becoming director of a program called Enviroschools, with a pilot group of three schools. From this beginning, in 1999, Enviroschools has grown over the past ten years to enroll 213,000 students today — roughly 5% of the entire New Zealand population.

Unlike the utopian proposals put forth by Cedric Price, Archigram, and other visionary architects, the proposals of Ocean Earth have taken the form of viable solutions for mass communications, education, and energy production. In many cases, Ocean Earth's work has entailed re-conceptualization of social and political territories along completely different lines, as well as a rethinking of labor. The work sits in unfamiliar territory, somewhere in between established paradigms for art, business, and science, projecting a worldview somewhere in-between capitalism and anarchist utopia.

Fend is tall and thin, apparently averse to palaver. Conversations with him begin as if they might be ended at any moment by forces beyond immediate control. Until then, there is a great deal of ground to be covered and not enough time to cover it. To a meeting during his recent trip to New York, he brought an oversized suitcase, full of drawings and papers, from which he procured plans and documentation from Ocean Earth as he spoke. Files were opened. Xeroxes were made. Photographs were taken. The air in the room was bated. In Fend's company, one has the palpable sense that the clock is ticking on civilization.

Fend expresses frustration with the economic disempowerment of artists. "I have long argued that the art world is corrupt. It is not transparent and not financially or legally honest. The power structure wants art to be disempowered." It does not want the changes that result from new thought, i.e., art. As a result, the art world has engendered a religion of disbelief. "Whatever is shown or said is supposed to be disbelieved, and it is supposed to not become real. It is supposed to not work."

He calls for artists to assume political and economic power to realize their ideas, particularly because he believes it is the role of artists to conceive of new solutions to address deteriorating ecological conditions. He laments, "artists are often afraid of taking their art to its architectural or mediaspace possibilities." As historical reference points for the influential practice he envisions, Fend cites Renaissance artist-engineers Le Nôtre and Vauban, who developed new strategies for political control of space. Vauban designed a pentagon-shaped fortress for Louis XIV that clearly influenced the design of the U.S. Pentagon building, and Le Nôtre is well-known as the designer of the landscape of modern France, which eventually influenced the city plan of Washington, D.C.

While Fend's models for practice are servants of the state, his agenda for art is cultivation of territory. He explains, "Rather than talk of money, one could use the broader term, from French, of *la Richesse*. Or abundance. Our task is to assure that the territory where we are has abundance, that it can support the healthy and long lives of the native animals and plants, and also support people." Thus considered, wealth is territorial. When people reduce wealth production to commodities, with earnings gained from sales to consumers, then society takes a depletive approach to wealth. It plunders the land. The French word for a site of *richesse* is *patrimoine*.

What are we doing about our patrimony? What are we doing, to use Duchamp's model, about our urinals? He called them *Fontaines* — that is, they would be sources, or fountains, of more richesse and abundance.

With characteristic impudence towards an academic status quo, Fend reaches beyond the widely accepted reading of the urinal — that the meaning of a cultural work is unstable, and is more or less an effect of the social and political space in which it exists — to emphasize instead the significance of its physical, formal qualities, in which he sees a new paradigm for thought and action.

Marco Roth of *n+1*, who met Fend during his recent trip, perhaps best describes the work of Ocean Earth as "the hopeful spirit of Situationism (*soyez raisonnable, demandez l'impossible!*) grafted on to the technological imagination of Futurism. If those Italians hadn't been fascists, they would've been a bit like Ocean Earth. It seems like a grandiose project, but it's grandiosity for the sake of the community, not for the individual artist. He strikes me as the most thoughtful kind of anarchist, someone who really asks what it would take to break the state or corporate monopolies on the means of control, surveillance and speed, and then sets about trying to realize it." (AK) ■

Part 2: Headless Body, Topless Bar

MORE NEWS FROM NOWHERE

GLASGOW – Listen.

"She thought fleas beautiful. Gazing at their stained sections through the microscope, she once said, gave her a feeling as ecstatic as smoking cannabis. In her bedroom she kept them in cellophane bags, in order not to miss a thing that they were doing . . . A lifelong atheist. She admitted that she had been tempted to believe in a creator when she discovered that the flea had a penis."

It's an obituary for Miriam Rothschild by Anne Wroe for *The Economist*, in 2005. According to the journalist, Rothschild's father "was a flea man" and that was the genesis of the passion that led her to discover the flea's jumping mechanism. This obituary ranges from the eccentric to the strangely poetic as Wroe notes, "The smell of a very gently squeezed ladybird, she once said, will stay on your hands for days."

The obituary column is another of the many glorious cul-de-sacs to be found in the best newspapers. It demands a discipline from its writers that rivals that of the haiku. All the basic biographical information should be included — date of birth and death, family, career etc. But it thrives on the telling detail and on anecdotes that would make a novelist weep in despair. Neil Gaiman, for instance, cites *The Telegraph*'s tribute to Colonel Michael Singleton as his favorite obituary. A prep school headmaster, Singleton was Spartan in his regimen.

"Long walks, cold dormitories, and regular hymn-singing were also an integral part of the education, along with cricket nets and Latin prose. Despite a brisk code of discipline, Singleton took a laissez-faire approach out of the classroom. Every November 5 the smallest boy in the school was sent down a tunnel to light the very core of the bonfire. None, so far as anyone can recall, was ever lost."

This is not just life from another, vanished world but also writing that understands the tone needed to delineate it precisely:

"What central heating there existed was not always effective, or even switched on. Boys were permitted to capture owls and keep them in the fives court, provided they caught enough sparrows to feed them. One boy recalls being given the task of rearing a lamb to which he developed some emotional attachment. The animal, called Lottie, disappeared shortly before the school's Christmas feast, and the boy realised what had happened only when he was the first to be summoned for second helpings."

Humor and eccentricity certainly help an obituary along and often it's the more obscure candidates who provide this while the famous dead bore us with their historical achievements. Sometimes, though, an obituary can shed an entirely new light on a tired subject, as in the case of Lady Bird Johnson. Keith Colquhoun describes a moment in her life like this: "November 22nd 1963 started in a drizzle, but soon turned bright. The sun shone on Dallas, the breeze was light, and Lady Bird Johnson enjoyed the drive in the open limousine, even when the Secret Service man thrust her husband down to the floor, even when the car screeched so violently round the corner by the hospital that she feared they would be flung out of it. Looking towards the first limousine, she