



Country /City United States of America / New York City
University / School City College of New York / Spitzer School of Architecture
Academic year 2021-2022
Title of the project Times Square Catalog: Tools for Decarbonization
Authors Casey Breen

TECHNICAL DOSSIER

| | |
|---|---|
| Title of the project | Times Square Catalog: Tools for Decarbonization |
| Authors | Casey Breen |
| Title of the course | Landscape Architecture Studio III / IV: Unit 28 |
| Academic year | 2021-2022 |
| Teaching Staff | Denise Hoffman Brandt and Christine Facella |
| Department / Section / Program of belonging | Master of Landscape Architecture Program |
| University / School | City College of New York / Spitzer School of Architecture |



Written statement, short description of the project in English, no more than 250 words

“We are as gods and might as well get used to it.” -- Stewart Brand, Whole Earth Catalog, 1968

This sentiment has echoed in the popular imagination, from initial responses in the late sixties to the Blue Marble photo of 1972 to our contemporary discourse on climate change. This project takes its from from the Whole Earth Catalog, a countercultural publication born out of the civil unrest and cultural recalibration of the late 1960s. The catalog promoted an anti-establishment self-sufficiency that championed DIY mentalities as a resistance to threats of authoritarianism that were of public concern at the time, hence its emphasis on tools and manuals. Many of the questions raised in the Catalog are relevant today, particularly ones of authority and responsibility. The format of the catalog itself became a tool for asking questions about decarbonization within the context of Times Square; namely, how culturally dominant modes of thinking about climate produce solutions-oriented tactics for decarbonization. These so-called “solutions” reproduce consumerist logics that are at the core of the issue to begin with. This project proposes a tool, in keeping with the Whole Earth Catalog, that challenges this false logic, instead opening up possibilities for flexibility in our responses to climate change.

For further information

Máster d'Arquitectura del Paisatge - UPC

Contact via email at:
master.paisatge.comunicacio@gmail.com

biennal.paisatge@upc.edu

Máster d'Arquitectura del Paisatge - UPC

Sede ETSAB - Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya

Calle Jordi Girona, 15. Edificio Omega 1-3
08034 Barcelona - Spain

COAC - Colegi oficial d'Arquitectes de Catalunya

Carrer Arcs, 1-3
08002 Barcelona - Spain

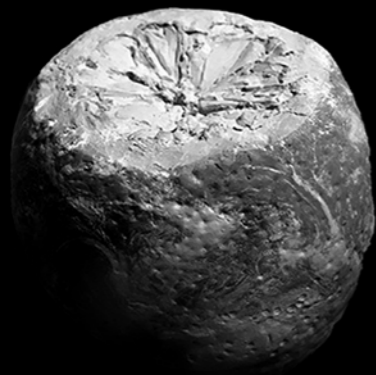
12th International Biennial Landscape Barcelona

Barcelona November 2023

SCHOOL PRIZE

TIMES SQUARE CATALOG

access to tools



Fall 2021
free

TIMES SQUARE CATALOG 2021

PURPOSE

We are of flesh and might as well get used to it. So far, late capitalism, technology, and corporatization have universalized incandescence so as to blot out both danger and red-hot excitement. All that was wild has been domesticated, sanitized, and marketed so as to be suitable for consumption to even the most conservative domiciles. In response to this new language of domestication, we should remember Donna Haraway's warning, that "small is not so much beautiful as pre-eminently dangerous."¹ Rather than reproduce tendencies toward authoritarianism, might we recognize the tactics of domination and strive toward real intimacy in the public realm? Tools that aid this process are promoted by the TIMES SQUARE CATALOG.



FUNCTION

The TIMES SQUARE CATALOG functions as an evaluation and access device. With it, the user should know better what is worth knowing and where and how to do the knowing.

An item is listed in the CATALOG if it is deemed:

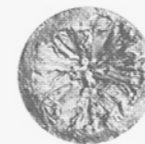
- 1) Useful as a tool,
- 2) Relevant to understanding authoritarian tactics,
- 3) Hand-crafted or mass-produced domestic item,
- 4) Underlying logic to modes of mass culture.

This information is continually revised according to the experience and suggestions of CATALOG users and staff.

USING THE CATALOG



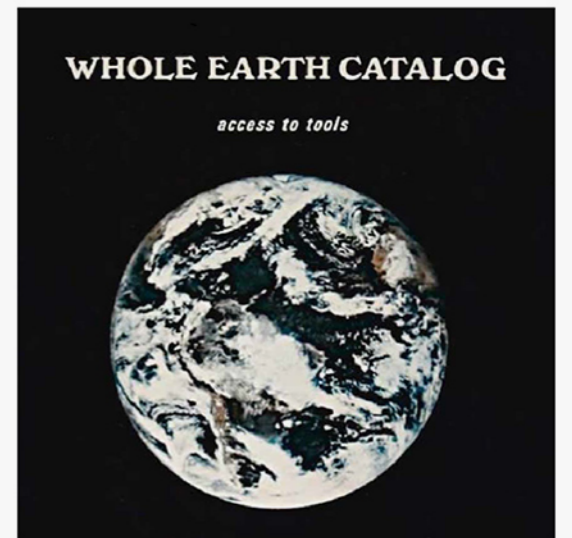
The lemon appears next to book covers and tools to help you estimate size.



Reconnaissance of a God Complex

The Whole Earth Catalog fashioned itself as a libertarian handbook for resisting the authoritarianism much in the public psyche of the 1960s. The point of the Catalog was to confront issues of global scale through individual power, supplemented by the use of tools.

The project assumed human omniscience aided by the recent developments in science and technology. "We are as gods." Make no mistake about it, this is an admission of guilt, not power. If we are gods, we are responsible for the mortal world to which we belong. Far from being put to rest after the last edition was published in 1994, this guilt continues to characterize cultural attitudes toward decarbonization and climate change. In seeking to subvert the tendency toward authoritarianism, might we ditch this baggage and remind ourselves that we are not gods, after all? What kinds of avenues would this open for new behaviors?



PURPOSE

message: to resist authoritarianism, we must assume the responsibility of a god - no wonder people don't want to decarbonize!

RESPONSIBILITY

We are as gods and might as well get used to it. So far, remotely done power and glory—as via government, big business, formal education, church—has succeeded to the point where gross obscure actual gains. In response to this dilemma and to these gains a realm of intimate, personal power is developing—power of the individual to conduct his own education, find his own inspiration, shape his own environment, and share his adventure with whoever is interested. Tools that aid this process are sought and promoted by the WHOLE EARTH CATALOG.

Editor's Note ~~Author's Note~~

Replicating the structure of the Whole Earth Catalog, this document does not erase existing logics, rather uses editing, annotating, and layering as a way of bringing out some of the original project's tensions.

As much as selling tools, the Whole Earth Catalog sold a social agenda, with a particular affinity for promoting publications with a libertarian bent. The first draft of my version of this catalog used this format to investigate the domestication of public space in Times Square, through photo documentary, writing, and a heavy theoretical armature.



Admittedly, this structure served as a kind of armor, in which I, the Author, could project my fears and hopes for the future through other texts without taking full responsibility for the thoughts and feelings that I used to frame my understanding of the Square.

I, the Editor, used that draft as a basis for self-reflection, to start to think about the attitudes I felt I needed to legitimize through others' words. As a starting point, the Times Square Catalog serves as a documentary of mass culture, from which we can begin to think about reframing our attitudes toward decarbonization. On another more personal level, it speaks to fear of accountability for thoughts and actions, and a personal effort to reclaim it.

Understanding Wilderness

Wilderness is an apt metaphor with which to begin a understanding of the culture, fear around climate change. As Carolyn Finney points out, dominant and dominating narratives posit wilderness as a thing to be feared, whose unpredictability is opposed by the myth of a 'civilized' culture, one that is controlled and predictable.

the Square lacks in wild plant A decarbonized future is one, such wilderness. Guilt becomes a handy tool for avoiding the fear and uncertainty concomitant to really thinking about climate change. Rather than confronting these feelings, we adopt a solutions-oriented mindset, looking for silver bullets that fix all of our problems, rather than interrogating the logic of the problem in the first place. of dominant 'civilizing' forces at The good news is that confronting guilt gives us an opportunity to try something new: intimacy as a tactic for resisting logics of domination. How might acknowledging our own fear allow us to stretch and embrace wilderness, to face the unknown in a way that frees us of our god complex and its paralyzing guilt? How might this unlock new opportunities and joy, new modes of knowledge?



Black Faces, White Spaces: Reimagining the Relations of African Americans to the Great Outdoors
Carolyn Finney
2014

\$21.09 used



Photo of Jackie CURTIS
Leeo Black Childers/Rodfems
January 1st, 1970

Representations of 'primitive' Africans were used to perpetuate and sustain the ideas and values of the West that supported economic growth while at the same time reflecting the feelings and thoughts that justified actions of moral superiority and shaped the social imagination. Whether they were images of the white explorer, the happy 'darkie' with his white master, or the stereotype of a black person with caricatured big lips and broad nose, popular representations of black people were effective at essentializing black identity and emphasizing black difference ... For a significant part of American history (well into the twentieth century), black representation was controlled largely by white men whose own agendas required the naturalizing of difference. By 'fixing' difference and determining that difference to be 'natural' as opposed to cultural, these representational authorities have ensured that black representations are then 'beyond history, permanent and fixed' and are relegated to an ideological and discursive place where meaning is protected from the possibility of change.

[Black Faces, White Spaces]

While Frederick Jackson Turner argued that 'wilderness promoted democracy, while civilized society, by contrast, fertilized tyranny because the very process of civilization compelled one to conform,' the experience of turpentine workers reveals 'the worst kind of despotism' and not the 'rugged individualism espoused by white environmental proponents in regard to having a wilderness experience.'

[Black Faces, White Spaces (quoting Johnson and McDaniel 2006)]

Banalities: Choosing Nothing

Guilt at the scale of godliness can induce a sense of anxiety that paralyzes. What can be done when our responsibility is for a whole planet, that we've construed as inept and fragile? An apt method of assuaging that pain is repression, pretending there is nothing to be done at all. The power of this tactic lies in a collective decision to turn a blind eye, a charge led by politicians. What's left of our guilt - a sense of urgency, anxiety about the future - becomes banal. Not only do we lose all impetus for action, but we lose the ability to think about our action as a moral or political statement.

of escapism tells us nothing. This move ties in nicely with our obsession with progress. Rather than confronting guilt about the past, we pretend it never happened and hide our shame. Some might even like the pain.



Constructing Fragility: Earth Photographs

When the Blue Marble photograph was released, the response was quasi-hysterical over the alleged fragility of Earth and our own smallness. The prevalence of satellite imagery has made even this feeling banal, even while the climate crisis normalizes disaster.

Earth Photographs from Gemini III, IV, V
NASA
1967

\$7.00 (1968 dollars)

In expounding on Times Square and its far-reaching cultural associations, this catalog investigates what it means to live with each other and be human, and how we might try to do so in a more humane way.



The Human Condition
Hannah Arendt

\$10.29 used

[The Human Condition, 2]

Eichmann in Jerusalem: A report on the Banality of Evil
Hannah Arendt
1963

\$8.49 used

Leviathan
Thomas Hobbes
1651

\$5.39 used



The Banality of Green Capitalism
Author
2021

free

Notes on Doom, Utopia, and Progress

Holding out for a Hail Mary isn't so different from holding out for an apocalypse. In either case, we self soothe from the trauma of the present disaster with the idea that, at some point in the future, a moment of certainty will come, meaning we won't have to contend with the discomfort of reckoning with the choices we as a society have made leading up to that point. Put another way, we won't have to look at ourselves in the mirror and be honest about our values. Salvation or damnation, at least we'll have the luxury of knowing precisely where we stand.

Even if this day of reckoning comes, the question of what we should do until then still stands. These fantasies of godly moral reckoning take us out of the present moment, where things aren't so clear. Where could we go if we put ourselves back in the now-time?

Our symposium discussion of utopia reflect the pertinence of this question. I was particularly struck by the question of whether all utopias can have anything in common, that the universal satisfaction of basic human needs - food, water, shelter - are not

even a unifying concern. And yet, Walter Benjamin points at that amazement at this truth - that it is still a utopian yearning to imagine even a basic standard of living for the global population - is not the beginning of knowledge. Knowledge lies in views of the past that upset the teleology that got us here and put us on the path to apocalypse or a Hail Mary, whatever you want to call it.

What does an alternate view of history mean for our future? I think it could mean putting that aside for a moment, and finding meaning in the mess.

VIII
The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the "state of emergency" in which we live is not the exception but the rule. We must attain to a conception of history that is in keeping with this insight. Then we shall clearly realize that it is our task to bring about a real state of emergency, and this will improve our position in the struggle against Fascism. One reason why Fascism has a chance is that in the name of progress its opponents treat it as a historical norm. The current amazement that the things we are experiencing are "still" possible in the twentieth century is not philosophical. This amazement is not the beginning of knowledge - unless it is the knowledge that the view of history which gives rise to it is untenable.



By 'fixing' difference and determining that difference to be 'natural' as opposed to cultural, these representational authorities have ensured that black representations are 'beyond history, permanent and fixed' and are relegated to an ideological and discursive place where meaning is protected from the possibility of change.



The messianic does not happen in time. It is not something that can happen in time. It is actually that which... enacts, I guess we would have to say, a cessation of happening, or stills a set of happenings.

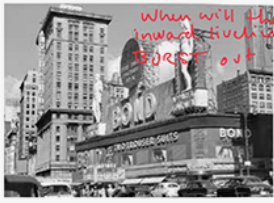


Performance Spectatorship **On the Town**

The modern city enables an individual 'to be both himself and someone else.' But if we can, we have the capacity to exposer la foule, to 'marry the crowd,' and to 'take a bath of the multitude' this experience can bring us 'feverish delights' that people who are 'locked up in themselves' can never imagine. 'What people call love is small... compared with that orgy, that holy prostitution of the soul that gives itself totally, in all its poetry and charity, to the unexpected that appears, to the unknown that passes by.'

[On the Town (quoting Baudelaire), xxii]

One important way in which people have always experienced Times Square, and still do, has been to adopt a favorite sign, to be alone with it, to make it a part of their inner lives. This means uncoupling the sign from whatever commodity it was meant to promote and placing it in a different system of meaning all our own... The human capacity to give things new names is a capacity not to be swept away by floods of commodities, not to be reduced to passive acquiescence, keeping ourselves inwardly, imaginatively alive.



Her [Times Girl] anonymous creator must have believed that her dishabille signified authenticity, and that authenticity was important. It also suggests a seriousness, a work ethic, a form of professionalism. Times Girl doesn't look like a woman who would reject admirers; she might even invite them into her tiny dressing room, dressed as she is. But she is telling the world that she does not want to be rescued from what she is doing. As much as anybody at the Times, she is at home in her work.

[On the Town, xvii]



Postcard for Times Building, featuring the Times Girl 1908

Where can we find models for new ways of engaging with the world that foster intimacy, with both ourselves and others, and enable us to break out of old modes of problem solving?

Square as a place in which Marshall Berman's writings on Times Square offer a sense of critical hope that I badly want to believe, one that echews views of the past as black, white, or rose-tinted.

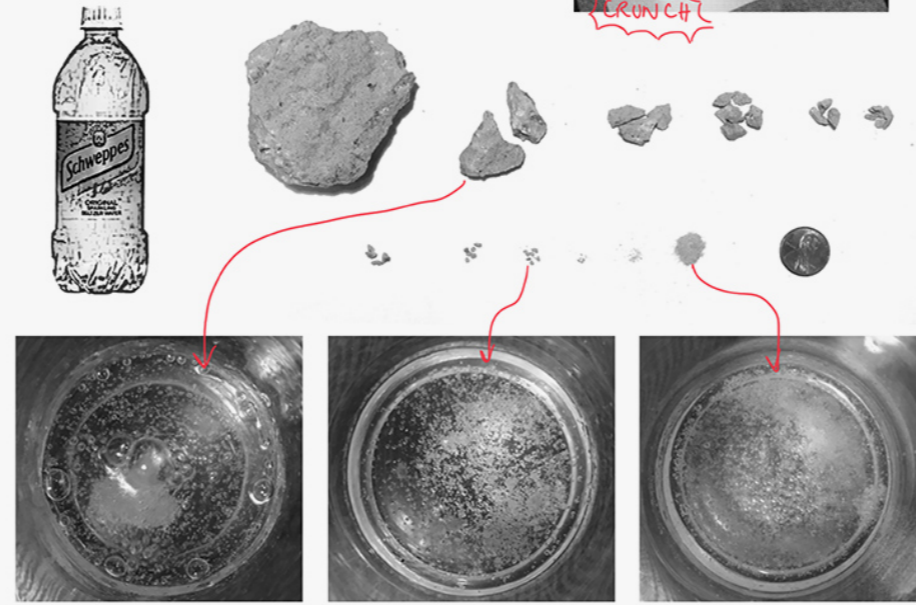


On the Town: One Hundred Years of Spectacle in Times Square Marshall Berman 2006

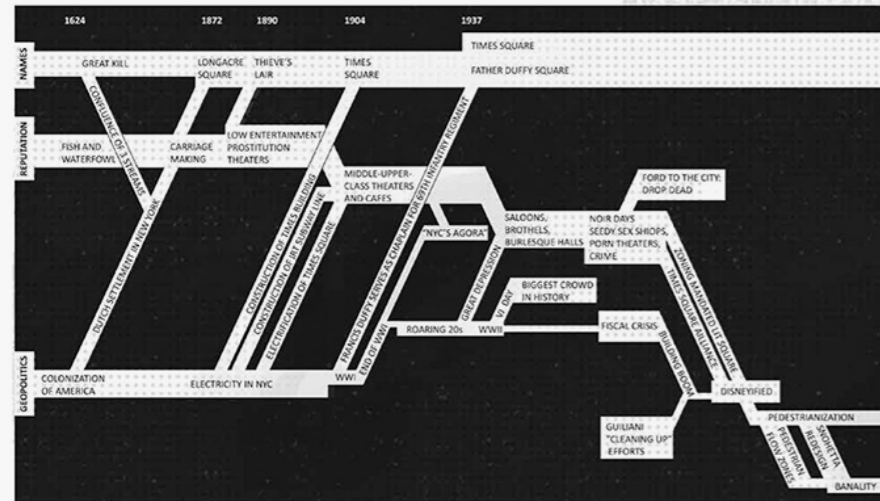
\$4.79 used

Taking Matters into My Own Hands

Frustrated with the logics I encountered in my olivine research, I conducted my own experiments, more interested in getting to know this rock more intimately than interrogating it as an input to an engineered climate solution. It did, indeed, react with carbon (from a carbonated beverage) releasing a burbling display of oxygen as the result of the promised chemical reaction. The rock was animated by its encounter with the seltzer. Outside of the numbers, could this type of encounter be valuable in reframing our understanding of carbon?



Looking Back



A Step into the Void

How might we take what we have learned and try to embrace uncertainty with open arms? Perhaps olivine has a role to play, other than simply an inert tools. Tools shape our perception of the world, in addition to the world itself. Reframing our understanding of our tools means reasserting what we can and should be doing. While this step is nothing more than a probe, it offers an alternative ways of conceiving of engagement with our surroundings, using one of Marshall Berman's favorite signs from Times Square's history as a jumping-off point.



Bond Spectacular Waterfall Sign in Times Square, New York City Postcard Boston Public Library

free

