

Rejecting the Nature/Culture Dichotomy: Robert Horvitz interviewed

by Maria Kruglyak

Originally put online by Museu de Arte, Arquitetura e Tecnologia [Museum of Art, Architecture and Technology], Lisbon, Portugal, as part of MAAT's exhibition "Visual Natures: The Politics and Culture of Environmentalism in the 20th and 21st Centuries" (2022) - <https://ext.maat.pt/longforms/rejecting-natureculture-dichotomy>

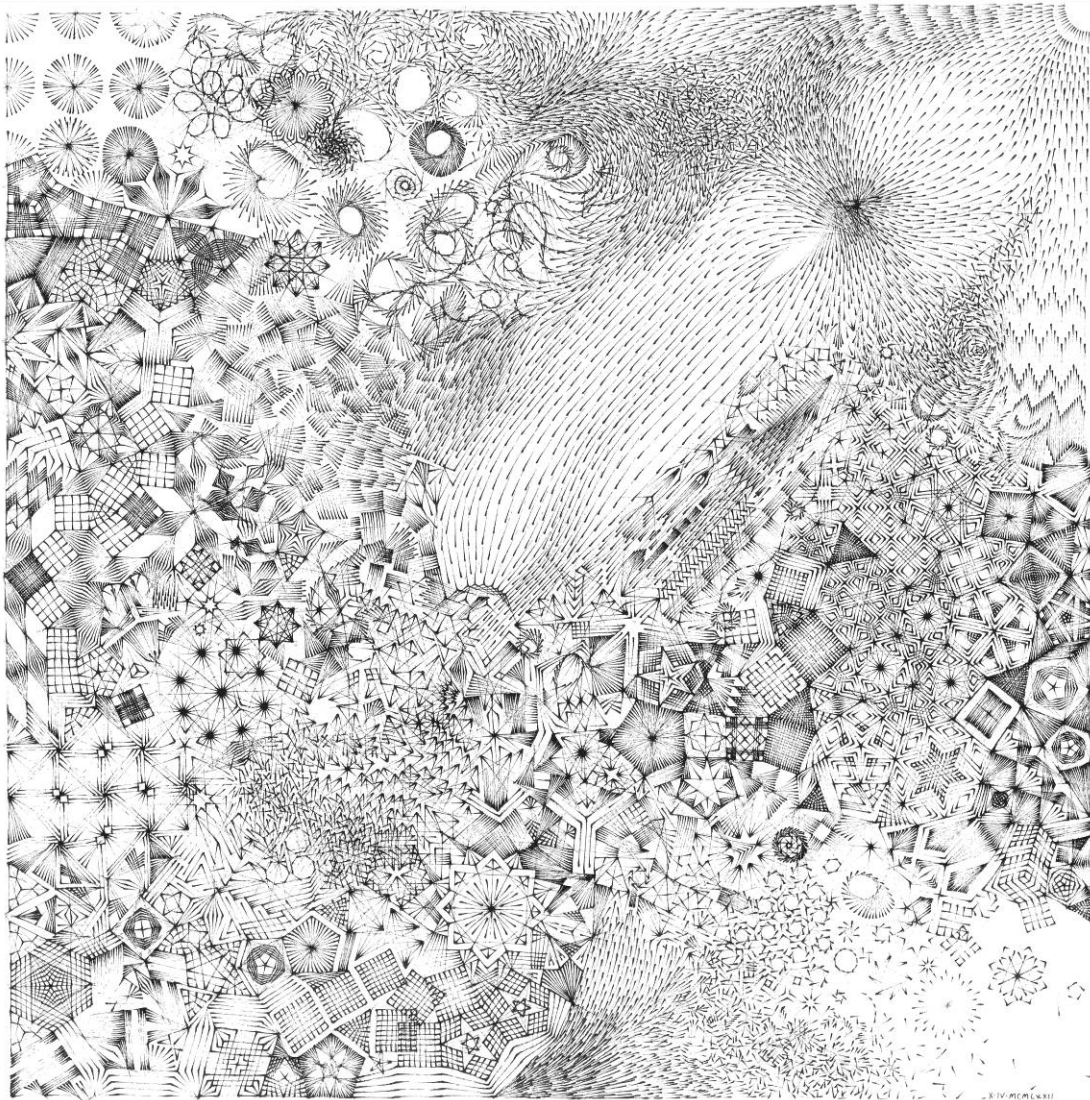


MAAT: *You wrote extensively for the Whole Earth publications and Artforum, but I'm curious about how it all started. I understand that Jack Burnham was a big inspiration. How did you two meet and what was it that made you start writing?*

Robert Horvitz: In school I didn't think I was a particularly good writer, nor did I enjoy it, so I hadn't thought about writing as a career. But I met Alan Sonfist at the Akron Art Institute in 1972. I had a drawing show there, which was followed by a show of Alan's; so our visits to Akron overlapped. I liked his work and knowing that he was a city boy who loved nature, I invited him and his girlfriend to share a house with me in a beautiful forest in Massachusetts that summer. I had promised to take care of the house so the owner could go on holiday. We got to know one another that way and at some point Alan asked if I would write about his work and I said yes.

To make *Artforum* think I had something more to offer, I decided to submit an interview with George Kubler at the same time. Kubler had written a book called *The Shape of Time*, which was really popular among art historians and intellectuals. I knew him through Yale. In fact, we ate lunch together regularly because he was affiliated with my residential college and got free meals there. At some point I asked him if I could record some of our lunch conversations with the idea of splicing together the interesting parts as an interview and he agreed. So I finished the Sonfist article and edited the Kubler interview and mailed them together to *Artforum* in the spring of 1973.

When both articles were published, I sent copies to Jack Burnham to introduce myself and ask if he had anything to say about them, because both touched his interests and we had a mutual friend in Donald Burgy. Jack had written an essay for the catalogue of an exhibition Burgy had at the Addison Gallery of American Art in 1970. I met Burgy just before that show [*Art Ideas for the Year 4000*] and we've been best friends ever since. Jack sent back a really gracious note, saying, among other things, that he wished he had written the Sonfist article, not because he liked Alan's work, but he liked my argument against the nature/culture dichotomy. We continued writing to each other until about 1980.



[Caption:] Drawing by Robert Horvitz: *A History of Ideas* (22 September - 4 October 1972), ink on paper, 14.5 x 14.5 inches

MAAT: *That is a great way to meet, and an impressive argument too. How would you say that you understood the relationship of nature and culture? How do you understand it now? And how did Jack Burnham understand it?*

Robert Horvitz: It's unfortunate that Jack isn't around to answer for himself, but he wrote on this subject extensively in *The Structure of Art*. However, his thinking evolved significantly after that. It'll take a while to summarise, so bear with me while I quote him:

"The fundamental dichotomy expressed in mythic forms is that of Nature and Culture. Culture represents all categories created through or by man: family or tribal members, domestic animals, and artifacts. Entities falling outside the control and domain of man belong to nature... Culture is the conceptual means for distinguishing man from nature... In art, on the other hand, any entity, natural or cultural, can be naturalized for use as subject... Undoubtedly conscious knowledge of the rules of art would dispel the illusion of art at once, since these deal with unconscious mechanisms concerning the use of objects,

materials, and concepts in mediating reality, namely, in defining the artist's relationships to nature and culture... [Art's] efficacy is in conjoining permissible cultural and natural phenomena through the agency of the artist..."

So the artist conjoins and balances but does not resolve the nature/culture dichotomy. That's based on Claude Levi-Strauss' ideas, which Jack turned to in response to criticisms of *Beyond Modern Sculpture* [BMS]. On the first page of *The Structure of Art* he wrote:

"Much of the impetus behind *The Structure of Art* results from my own as well as others critical examination of my first book, *Beyond Modern Sculpture*. By last year the internal inconsistencies of that book were very much on my mind. And just as vexing is the fact that I believe that many of its theories remain creditable. Its historical presumptions impelled me to study the writing of Claude Levi-Strauss with more than casual interest... [BMS] defines chronological parallels between science and art as responsible for shifts in visual expression. Chronologically there are some strong correspondences between artistic and scientific innovation, but these are coincidental not causal relationships."

Really, Jack? If you read *BMS*, you know that it argued for something a lot stronger than coincidental correspondences and chronological parallels. Jack's critics accused him of technological determinism. He seemed to accept that criticism and embraced structuralism instead.

As far as I'm concerned, he was led astray by Levi-Strauss' idea that nature and culture is "the fundamental dichotomy" and he followed that into a rabbit hole of increasingly tenuous refinements. "Nature as Artifact: Alan Sonfist" interested him because I rejected that dichotomy. I see humanity and all cultural expressions as part of nature. And I can say from our correspondence that Jack realized one should not – cannot! – separate nature and culture. But in terms of his intellectual re-positioning, that realisation came too late. The revised edition of *Structure of Art* came out in June 1973 and my Sonfist article was published in November 1973. But he never outgrew his interest in structuralism, and in fact, he pushed deeper into even more esoteric non-causal systems of explanation, like Kabbalah.

The reason wasn't clear until much later, and here I must paraphrase because he never gave a full written account of his mystical turn. But the gist of it was that he realised the part of art history that you can explain as a rational response to the impact of technology is less important than the part that you cannot explain that way. Artists like Marcel Duchamp and Joseph Beuys have outsize impact precisely because their work cannot be explained by technology's influence; there's a lot more there. Jack told Lutz Dammbeck in 2002 that "art works not from what you see and what can be said about it but what you see and you don't understand." That puts critics and historians in a difficult position, because the only way to talk about such work is with explanations that evade understanding. And that's what Jack started producing after *The Structure of Art*, and fewer and fewer places wanted to publish such articles.

MAAT: *Returning to Alan Sonfist, what is your understanding of his Time Landscape within this dichotomy of nature and culture?*

Robert Horvitz: *Time Landscape* combines plants native to Manhattan which co-evolved long before humans became the dominant influence, so it shouldn't surprise anyone that they thrived when re-assembled. The first time I saw it, a few months after the initial planting, it was already clear that it was going to look very different from an abandoned lot: it had a vitality that was greater than the sum of the parts. It certainly made Alan's point that such references are needed to show us what our environment was and what it might be like without us. It also showed "re-wilding" can work even in a city centre.

Let me come at this from a different angle. Alan was sensitive about his work's similarity to Hans Haacke's. But I always saw them as different. Hans was exploring systems, and he realised very quickly that the concept of a system is a bridge between nature and culture. He crossed that bridge very early to explore social and political systems. Alan worked with systems too and crossed the same bridge occasionally. But he was motivated by a love of nature which one didn't feel in Haacke's work, which was rather more, can I say, systematic. Some people found Alan's work more naive because of that difference – its "tree hugger" aspect. I saw that as simply an honest difference between them and over time I think Alan's love of nature has been recognised as something that gives his work meaning. I'm sorry I didn't bring that out more in my article. Instead, I over-intellectualised his work for my own purposes, mainly to challenge Jack Burnham.

MAAT: *Turning to your many years of involvement with Whole Earth, how did that begin?*

Robert Horvitz: After that summer with Alan, I lived with a woman who was a big fan of the *Whole Earth Catalog* and when they announced that they were going to start a magazine, she subscribed. I started reading *CoEvolution Quarterly* from the first issue, too, and I saw it getting better and better. But it had one very odd weakness: their coverage of the arts was poor-to-non-existent. So I wrote to Stewart Brand about that, and cited earthworks as an important development in sculpture that his readers should know about. I sent him a sketch of *Time Landscape* that Alan had made for his proposal to the City of New York; photos of a work by Charles Ross; a photo of one of my drawings; and texts by Donald Burgoyne and Henry Flynt. About a month later I got a postcard from Stewart. It said they loved everything I sent. They'll publish everything but spread over the coming year. Keep sending us stuff and how about if we list you on our masthead as art editor? I sent a postcard back saying "Great, great and GREAT!!". And that was the beginning of a fourteen-year relationship, which lasted until I moved to Prague in 1991 and saw that I wouldn't have as much time for gathering and preparing material for them as I had in the 1980s.

During that time I was art editor of *CoEvolution* and the *Whole Earth Review*. I only contributed reviews to the *Catalogs*. But I also hosted the Whole Earth conference on the WELL, which was the online community we started in 1985. In any issue of the magazines I had 2-4 pages to present artwork, and then I started writing about the radio spectrum and electronic communication. So after a while my title on the masthead changed from "art editor" to "Washington correspondent" and then to "contributing editor."

MAAT: *What was your experience working with Stewart Brand?*

Robert Horvitz: Stewart was already starting to phase himself out of *Whole Earth* around the time that I came onboard, though that wasn't clear until the 1980s when he really wasn't involved at all. He wanted to focus on his Global Business Network, which aimed at changing the thinking and behaviour of large corporations. When he was still *Whole Earth's* publisher and editor, we rarely spoke so I felt that I had complete autonomy in selecting work for the magazines.

You have to understand that I didn't live in the San Francisco area. I lived on the east coast, so my relationship with *Whole Earth* was by phone, mail and, after the mid-1980s, text conferencing through the WELL. I did visit the office a few times to meet people in person, and participated in some events they organised. Stewart and I discussed very early on whether I should move to California, but he felt I would be more useful staying on the east coast because it gave me access to different people and projects and I could run errands that would have been inconvenient or costly to get someone from California to do. I worked much more closely with Stewart's successors than with him, especially with Kevin Kelly. Kevin and I spoke almost every week to brainstorm ideas for the magazine.

MAAT: *You mentioned in our earlier conversation how one edition of the Catalog was created in a camper-van as an experiment, but that this was not how it was usually produced. What was the process otherwise and could you tell that particular story?*

Robert Horvitz: The *Whole Earth Catalogs* were pasted up the old fashion way: by hand, with beeswax or rubber cement spread on the back of small strips of paper and typeset words on the front. Our typesetter was an IBM Selectric typewriter, because it had variable spacing and a variety of fonts. This first photo shows the *Catalog* production in 1971. Stewart's on the left, talking on the phone:



[Caption:] Whole Earth's office during *Catalog* production in 1971.
Photographer unknown.

Stewart Brand pasting up the *Whole Earth Catalog*, 1968:



[Caption:] Stewart lines up a block of text. Photographer unknown.

Creating each *Catalog* page was like solving a jigsaw puzzle, except there is no unique solution. Here is Al Perrin trying to organise a page in the *Whole Earth Epilog*:



[Caption:] Alwyn T. Perrin organising a page of the *Whole Earth Epilog*, 1974. Photograph by Stewart Brand.

Office manager Andrea Sharp used a card file system to keep track of all the products (candidate and chosen) for review. What you don't see are the plastic bins used to sort and store the products themselves, which filled a small warehouse:



[Caption:] Office manager Andrea Sharp with her card filing system, 1974. Photograph by Stewart Brand.

In 1971 Stewart had the crazy idea to produce the *Last Catalog* in a desert seventy miles from the nearest telephone and with no access to electricity, just to show it could be done. They brought a geodesic dome in pieces to assemble there...



[Caption:] Geodesic dome assembled next to the *Last Whole Earth Catalog's* production location, 1971. Photograph by Stewart Brand.

...and a large inflatable building...

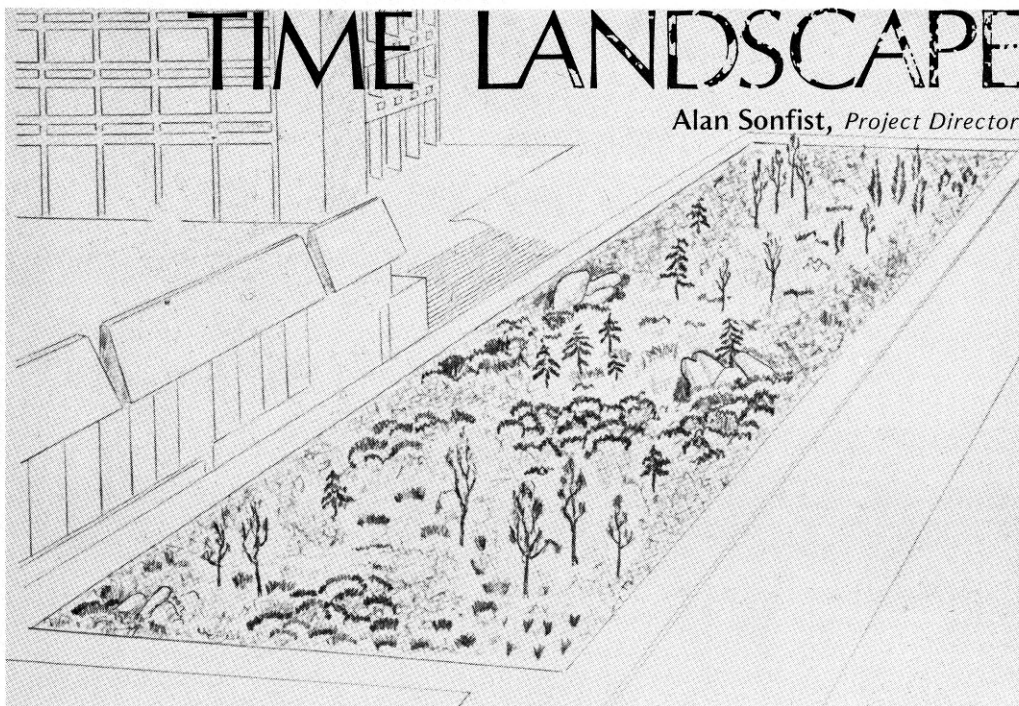


[Caption:] Inflatable building brought to production location for the *Last World Earth Catalog*, 1971. Photograph by Stewart Brand.

But the wind was so strong that it promptly blew these structures away and production had to move into the small AirStream camper-van that Stewart and his wife Lois used to transport supplies to the site. Only two people could fit in the van at the same time, which slowed the work so much that the idea had to be abandoned.

MAAT: *Fascinating. Could you also share some images of the pages you created for the magazines with us?*

Robert Horvitz: Here's one you're familiar with already. This is the first presentation of *Time Landscape* in print, from 1977:



10 YEARS

"Time Landscape" is a contemporary re-creation of the natural phenomena that once existed on a particular site. The project for New York City is being realized on an 18,000-square-foot lot at Houston and Bleecker Streets on LaGuardia Place. Presently, the site is partially paved and, as the Community Board has described it, is an "eye-sore" to the neighborhood. "Time Landscape" will re-create the pre-colonial forest, beginning with the first succession and planning for natural evolution to a mature forest over several decades.

The site has been analyzed by a team of researchers, each representative of a different reality of the land. A botanist and an ecologist have determined what natural phenomena probably existed in the pre-colonial

forest. An historical consultant has researched original deeds and documents of the land, tracing its shifting form through changes in use. An architect has helped design the site in relationship to the present community. This historical, botanical, and ecological information will be visible on Informational Plaques at the site. The project includes the publication of a booklet on the creation of the site with a step-by-step program for creating other "Time Landscapes" in cities all over the United States. The project is being done, and will be maintained, in cooperation with the owners of the adjacent buildings and Local Community Board No. 2, and has broad-based support from many different segments of the community.

The history of a city includes its pre-urban stages. In initial surveys taken to determine people's definitions of nature in the city, a psychologist found no comprehension or knowledge of the historical nature of the city. In "Time Landscape," past time is materialized in the present. It is a reference point for all the changes the surrounding land has undergone, as well as a public monument. Within an area of landmark buildings, we are creating landmark nature.

The concept of evolutionary change can be applied to any site in any city. This is a pilot project for a kind of reconstruction and documentation that can coincide with new building in the city. Gardens or plazas can be given meaning by being planted with forms indigenous to that site. Obvious examples are marsh pools, grassland flowers, rockledge mosses and ferns. Different periods of time can be selected for re-creation: prior to settlement, during agricultural use, or later, when trees and shrubs once immigrant to the site have been naturalized. Different stages in the natural succession of a forest or grassland can be chosen. The site can be maintained at one stage or allowed to progress to its mature state. Present conditions such as atmospheric pollution can be counteracted to maintain historical accuracy or allowed to modify the historical forest into a twentieth-century adaptation. Thus, as a city renews itself architecturally, it can also re-identify its origins and its unique natural-traditional characteristics. ■

Alan Sonfist has been working on this piece since 1969. He submitted a proposal to New York City to allow him to restore a tract of city-owned land to the state it was in prior to human settlement. He formed a non-profit research company called Conditions to figure out what that original state of New York City land most probably was. In 1972, it looked like he was going to be able to do it when Thomas Hoving of the Metropolitan Museum offered to let him use a quarter acre of Central Park on top of a proposed underground parking garage for the Met. This fell through when the parking lot was rejected by the City Council. Then he got Finch College to let him do it in a courtyard behind their museum in 1974, but Finch College went bankrupt before he got it together. Apparently now he has gotten permission to restore an abandoned city block in lower Manhattan. Virtually all of the research has long been done. Harvard Botanical Research has donated some trees and smaller flora, and Sonfist had a show of the material and research gathered, several months ago.

—Robert Horvitz

[Caption:] *Time Landscape* by Alan Sonfist in *CoEvolution Quarterly* #14 (summer 1977). Introduction by Robert Horvitz.

Here are a few pieces by Gary Rieveschl, an American who was living in West Berlin:

BREAKOUTS

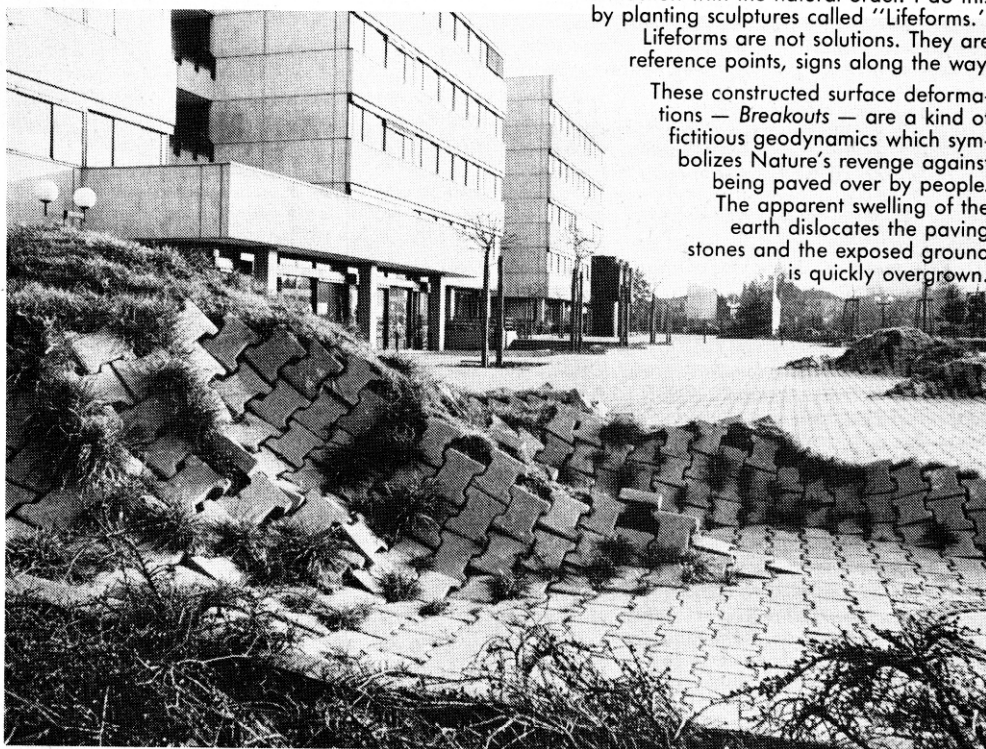
by Gary Rieveschl

My work is to find forms which signify our connection with the natural order. I do this by planting sculptures called "Lifeforms."

Lifeforms are not solutions. They are reference points, signs along the way.

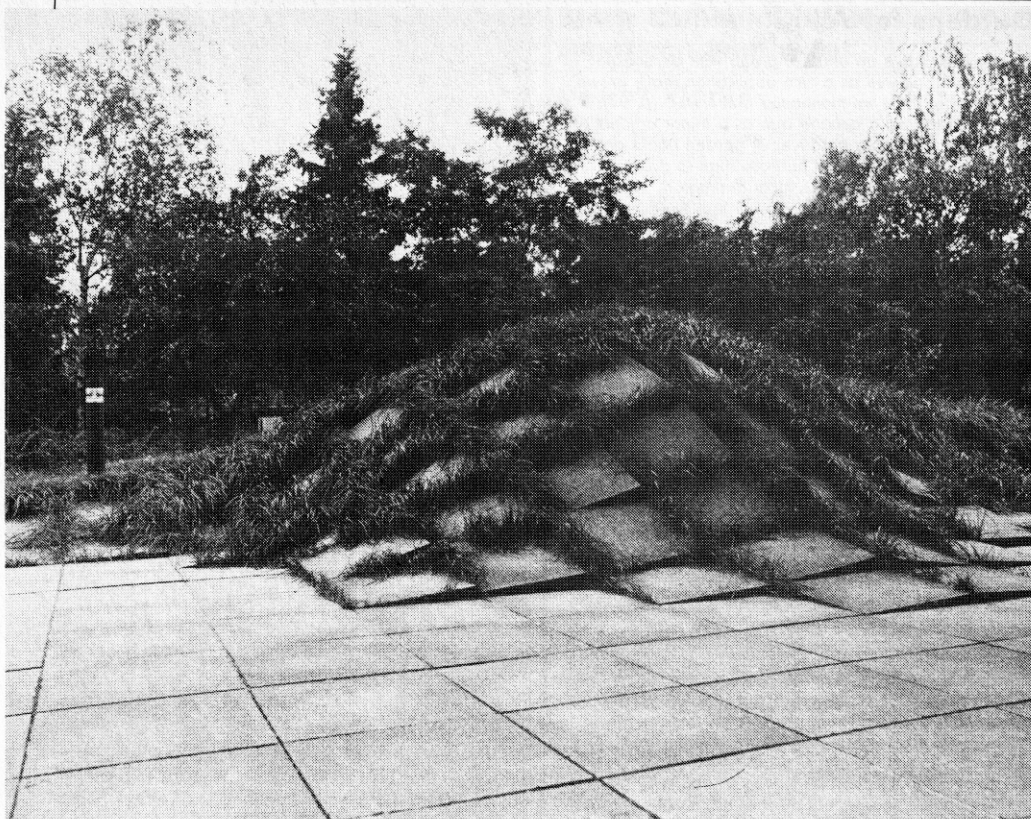
These constructed surface deformations — *Breakouts* — are a kind of fictitious geodynamics which symbolizes Nature's revenge against being paved over by people.

The apparent swelling of the earth dislocates the paving stones and the exposed ground is quickly overgrown.

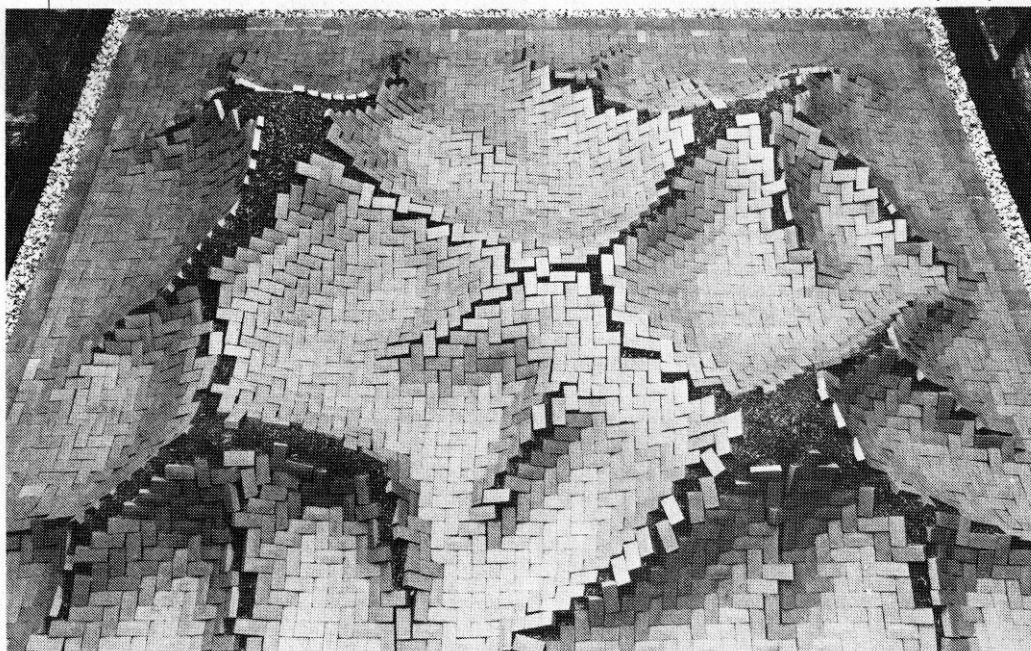


Technical High School for Chemistry, Biology and Physics, Rudow, West Berlin, 1982 (two views)





Wissenschaftszentrum, Bonn, 1979



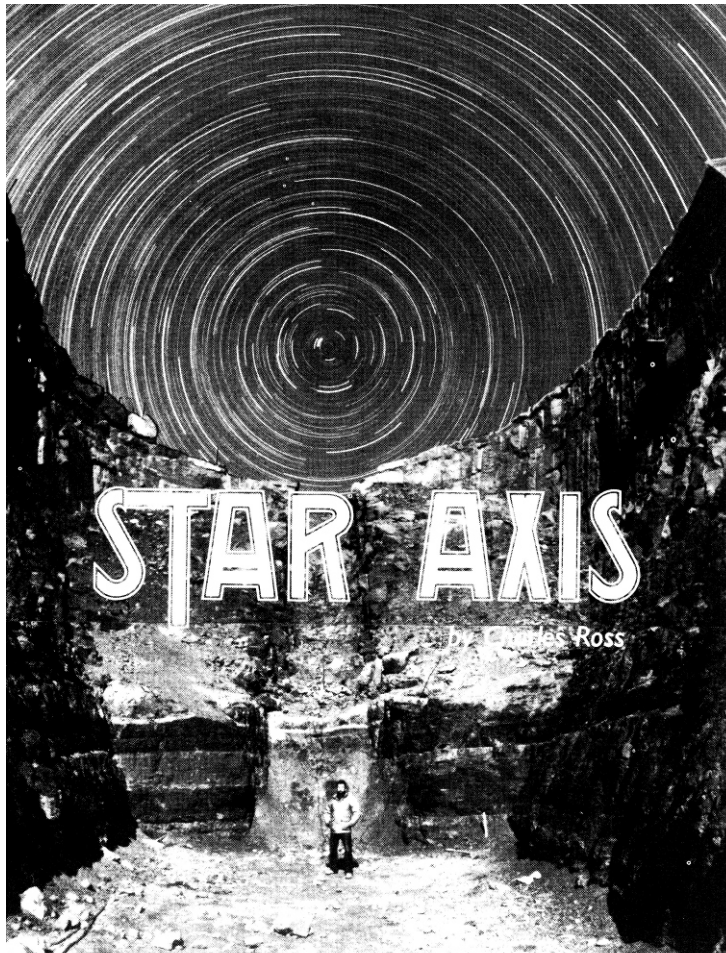
Courtyard, Bertelsmann Verlag, Gutersloh, 1980 (before vegetation appeared)

Born in Cincinnati in 1943, a graduate of Harvard, Rieveschl has been living in West Berlin since 1978.

—Robert Horvitz

[Caption:] Gary Rieveschl's "Breakouts" in *CoEvolution Quarterly* #39 (fall 1983). Introduction by Robert Horvitz.

Charles Ross' work was featured in both *CoEvolution* and the *Whole Earth Review*. This is the second layout, from 1985. Ross has been working on *Star Axis* for about forty years. He hopes to finish it in 2025:



Circumpolar star trails framed by the excavation. Polaris is the small bright arc at the center. In this photo the trails were made by many different stars; Polaris will turn in each of these orbits at some past or future time. The central channel awaits placement of the sighting tunnel.

Inside the star tunnel: Viewing Polaris as it rolls around the rim.



such an enormous time span as to be ordinarily imperceptible. Through *Star Axis* the entire cycle will be immediately visible.

Climbing the stairs of the star tunnel, one views progressively larger and larger circles of sky centered on the pole. From a particular stair, Polaris will be seen to roll around the far rim of the tunnel. Wherever one stands on the stairs, which are dated to give both past and future dates, the circle of sky framed by the tunnel will precisely represent Polaris's orbit for that particular epoch.

When the Egyptians were building pyramids, Thuban in the constellation of Draco marked true north. Now Polaris marks true north. In the year 2067 A.D., the Earth's axis will almost touch Polaris. Less than a blink away in astrotime, this rare alignment is framed from the first stair of the star tunnel.

About one quarter of the way up the tunnel is the circle where Polaris presently rolls around the rim with the turning of the earth. At the top of the tunnel, the largest orbit of Polaris encompasses the eye's entire field of view. By moving up and down the 11-story staircase, the viewer moves backward and forward in time and the vast time frame created by precession is spatially experienced.

The stairs emerge above the mesa through a 50-foot wedge-shaped tower tuned to the solar seasons. Solstice angles determine its shape. As the tower's shadow lengthens and contracts with the seasons, it defines a bow-shaped field. This shadow field is an artifact of precession projected in yearly solar time.

The sculpture, under construction since 1976, spans 1 1/2 of a mile across the top

A Work In Progress That Displays the Earth's Rotational Wobble



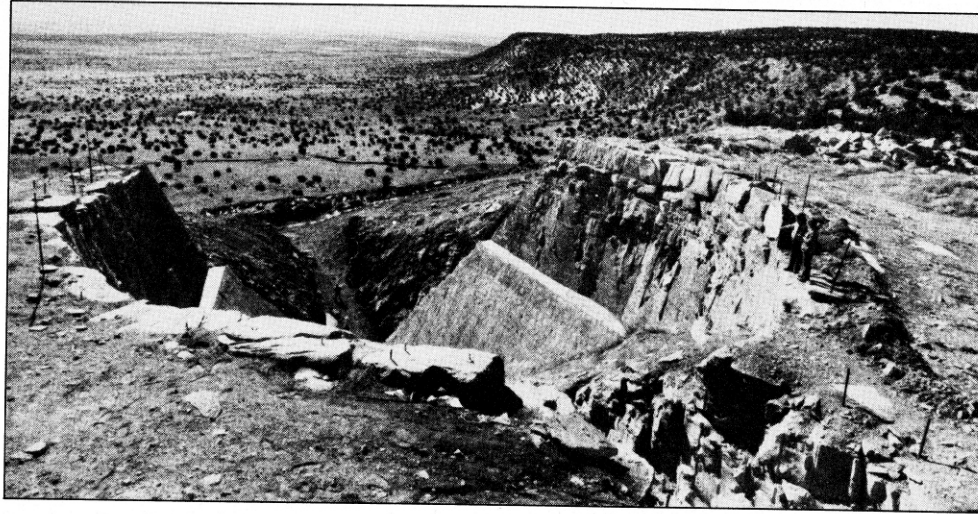
IN A SMALL MESA where the Sangre de Christo Mountains meet the plains east of Albuquerque, I am building an earth/sky sculpture called *Star Axis*.

A conical wedge has been hewn deep into layers of rock to accommodate the underground placement of a stainless steel tunnel that will be exactly parallel to the spinning earth's axis in order to sight and frame the north celestial pole star. Standing inside the tunnel and observing without the aid of lens or magnification, the star gazer will be able to see how our planet changes its alignment to the stars over a 26,000-year period. Called precessions, this cycle, which is caused by the earth slowly wobbling like a spinning top, occurs over

Much of Charles Ross's time has been devoted to this project since he last graced our pages ("Sunlight Convergence Solar Burn," CQ #16, pp. 104-7). When will it be finished? Depends on cash flow. Ross has been paying for the land, surveying, excavation and construction with earnings from the sale of his other artwork. The stonework is pretty much done. What remains is fabrication of the stainless steel tunnel and rim. Patrons needed. Contact his agent: Joyce Pomeroy Schwartz, Ltd., 17 West 54th St., New York, NY 10019. Exact location of the site will be made public when construction is finished.

—Robert Horvitz

The excavation: January 1985.



of the mesa. As work progresses there has been feedback from the land itself. In the summer of 1980 I had a recurring dream that demanded the work should have a "foot." At first I resisted. Then dreams on five consecutive nights described the shape in detail. Later I realized that not only does this form reflect the open cone as solid mass, but from an aerial view the two cones form the infinity symbol.

The site is isolated yet readily accessible.

A two-lane blacktop road passes through the region and five miles of dirt road have been built to gain access to the land. You approach the work by walking along a path around the east face of the mesa. Above are weathered sandstone cliffs where the Golden Eagle and the Red-Tailed Hawk occasionally land to rest. Looking out across the wide terrain of red mesas and tawny plains, you can just detect the curvature of the earth. It is a short walk to *Star Axis* through a natural desert garden.

A FUTURE VISIT

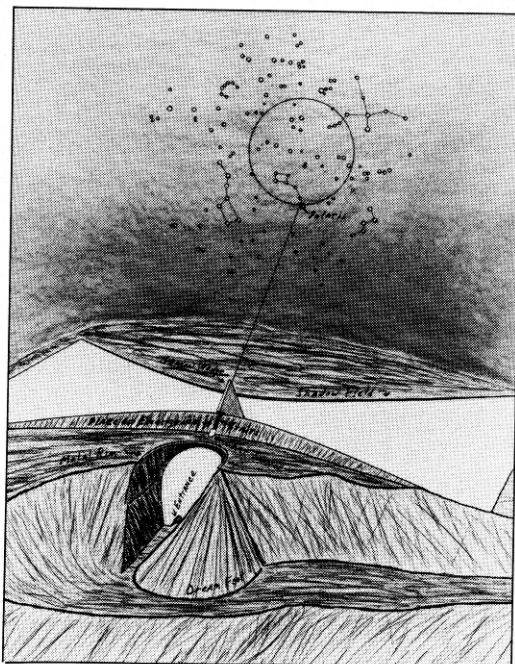
Rounding Dream Foot, you enter the rock-faced cone. Precession is focused at your feet. The funnelled shape lifts your gaze upward to a stainless steel ring that caps the rock. It frames the earth's eternal wobble in a razor sharp half-circle of cobalt sky. The edge of the steel is polished so that during the day a small beam of sunlight is reflected in the rim.

Inside the tunnel the walls give off a soft metallic glow. As you climb the stairs you are moving parallel to the earth's axis. The expanding circles of sky are ripples in the earth/star dance. At the top, framed in the largest and most distant pulse of Polaris, you look down to see the present moment marked by a shadow on the year-shaped field.

THEATER OF THE SKY

Whenever I visit one of the ancient observatories, I am struck by the thought that although precise measurement is an essential ingredient, it was not the only purpose for their construction. These monuments give a strong feeling of personal connection with a larger natural order. The builders shaped their efforts to embrace the universe into art and architecture.

With roots in antiquity, but constructed with modern measurement, materials, and engineering, *Star Axis* is created as a bridge to a fresh consciousness of our alliance with the stars. It is the first and largest of a group of art works planned for the mesa. Each work will look into light to gain perspective on our cosmic range. It is not necessary to know the technical details. The art work guides direct experience. *Star Axis* is a theater of the sky played in light to time. ■



The present alignment of *Star Axis* in the circle of precession.

[Caption:] Charles Ross' "Star Axis" in the *Whole Earth Review* #49 (winter 1985-6). Introduced by Robert Horvitz.

It's not an art layout, but here's a short piece I wrote for the 20th anniversary issue of the *Whole Earth Review* (1988) which is relevant to MAAT's survey of environmental

sculpture [Visual Natures]. Kevin Kelly asked regular contributors and staffers what they were working on and this is what I sent:

Robert Horvitz

is our man in Washington, DC, and our far-ranging scout for the unreported story. He's been reviewing unconventional art and science for *Whole Earth* since 1976. He captioned the picture to the right: "Peep," a 5-year old Guimo (guinea pig) from Peru, with his pet, "Robert Horvitz."

What am I working on now? Researching topics that may turn up as articles in these pages sooner or later. Don't want to blow any surprises, but one item on the list may work best as a capsule preview anyway.

An article by Philip J. Hilts in the *Washington Post* last June described a new remote-sensing technique called "seismic tomography." Developed about two years ago, the concept is similar to the CAT scans used in medical diagnostics. But instead of X-rays, seismic recordings from monitoring stations around the globe are integrated by computer to create 3-D images of the Earth's interior. So for the first time, we can peer into this huge hidden volume, which is the bulk of our planet. Compared to the vague generic model of the underworld we were taught in school, some of the features revealed by seismic tomography seem like science fiction.

Take the Earth's core — a red-hot sphere of liquid iron, right? Wrong, magma-breath. According to Adam Dziewonski, a geophysicist at Harvard, vibrations passing through the core behave as though the iron at the very center is compressed into "a single thousand-mile-wide crystal" swaddled in liquid iron. The rocky mantle around the core seems to have an irregular in-facing surface some 1,800 miles below us. "Anti-mountains" six to seven miles tall poke into the potato-shaped core, along with "anti-continentals" that may be ringed by "anti-oceans" of iron. As the Earth spins, the mantle's rough underside could generate currents and turbulence in the core. That may account for small fluctuations observed in the lengths of days, and the geomagnetic "storms" that disrupt our radio communications from time to time.

It used to be that we could only guess about the circulation

of matter in the Earth's mantle. But differences in density and temperature make it possible to track these processes tomographically. Our understanding of plate tectonics and continent formation should improve rapidly as we fill in the blank regions in our 3-D map of the planet.

Reading about seismic tomography for the first time gave me a rush of awe quite like the first photos of the Earth from orbit. As the "picture" of our planet's no-longer-inscrutable interior gets clearer, it's likely to have a similar unifying and reorienting effect. Since tomographs are more indirect and artificial than photographs, they may never be quite so compelling. But that also may stop them from becoming clichés.

In any event, completing the image of the *Whole Earth* that initially inspired this Publishing Empire is a mighty fine way to mark our 20th anniversary. For the 30th, let's add animation. ■



[Caption:] "What am I Working on Now?" by Robert Horvitz.

MAAT: *Going back to Stewart Brand moving away from the Whole Earth Catalog already in the 1980s—that was not something I had heard of. You also went on to work with a different cast of characters if I understand correctly?*

Robert Horvitz: When Stewart started publishing the *Whole Earth Catalog* he said he would only do it for 5 years, and he really did try to end with the *Last Whole Earth Catalog* in 1971. But public demand was insatiable and he went on to publish the *Whole Earth Epilog*, the *Whole Earth Ecolog*, the *Electronic Whole Earth Catalog*, the *Whole Earth Software Catalog*, the *Next Whole Earth Catalog*, the *Essential Whole Earth Catalog* and quarterly supplements. This was an increasingly repetitive burden, so in the early 80s he wanted out. But his exit was so gradual that many of us believed it would never be complete. Eventually it was. He just slowly shifted responsibility to others that he thought were ready to operate without his judgment as a safety net. Kevin Kelly's coming in as *CoEvolution's* editor made a big difference.

Kevin seemed to restore the energy of *Whole Earth's* early years without repeating what Stewart had done. So Stewart just got out of his way.

My post-*Whole Earth* transition was also pretty smooth. In 1989 I was putting together a 40-page section for the magazine called "Radio Earth". It was about living in an electromagnetic environment. We're normally not aware of it but the Earth has a huge permanent electrical charge, some of which manifests as lightning. The section had other topics too, like radio astronomy, deregulation of broadcasting, the health effects of radio exposure, etc. A TV journalist called while I was putting this together to ask if we would be interested in an article about pirate television in Eastern Europe. This was right around the time of the anti-communist uprisings so I said yes definitely. The journalist was Evelyn Messinger, one of the founders of Internews. Internews had pioneered the use of live interactive satellite TV programmes as a way to improve relations between hostile countries. They organised discussions between members of Congress and the Soviet Politburo, between Israelis and Palestinians, between religious leaders in Iran and the US. Brilliant, daring, big-league stuff. Internews wanted to get involved in the changes happening in eastern Europe and when we finished editing her article, Evelyn asked if I would join them. They had won a contract from the US government to write a report on what it would take to de-monopolize broadcasting in post-communist societies. I agreed to co-author that report and create a manual for people with no technical training about how to build and operate low-power radio stations. The *Local Radio Handbook*, as it was called, was a real hit. It was translated into six languages and went through multiple printings.

Evelyn then introduced me to the editor of the *New York Times'* Sunday magazine, who wanted to create a Centre for Independent Journalism in Prague. This would offer training and facilities for new Czech journalists and visiting foreign reporters. I was picked to be the centre's "director of radio activities" and moved to Prague in 1991. A few months later, George Soros hired Internews to develop a programme of support for journalism in the countries where he was creating foundations. Evelyn and I ran that programme: she handled television, I did radio, and together we started TransNews, a daily satellite video newsclip exchange for TV stations in eastern Europe. By 1995 our work was less about starting new stations and more about helping existing stations share programmes, lessons learned and how-to information. That led very naturally to expanding internet access throughout the region.

MAAT: *Fantastic. You mentioned at one point that when you moved to Europe and started this new line of work, your perspective on Whole Earth changed. What caused that shift after 14 years?*

Robert Horvitz: Almost everyone on the staff believed the *Whole Earth Catalog* was a big step toward planetary culture, and we really did make an effort to include resources and ideas from outside the US. But the reality was that everything we published was in English and nearly all the publications we reviewed were in English, too. That bias was more obvious when viewed from eastern Europe, where Russian and German were more common second languages than English.

David Marx just had an interesting thread on Twitter
[<https://twitter.com/wdavidmarx/status/1480332431345733635>] about the *Whole*

Earth Catalog's impact on Japanese fashion magazines, which apparently was huge even though they had no idea what the *Catalog* was about. They didn't get the philosophy behind the *Catalog*, its content or purpose, because of the language barrier. They just liked the style of presentation. So clearly language differences limited development of a truly global culture and that's something we couldn't overcome. Conditions have really improved since then, with the spread of the internet, online publishing and Google Translate. But magazine publishing on paper hasn't benefited from these changes. Quite the opposite.

The challenge we faced was: are there enough readers interested in both practical tools and advanced concepts – a combination essential to *Whole Earth's* appeal – to sustain the production of first-class magazines which carry no advertising? That formula worked for 20 years, but eventually costs and competition rose, and we were no longer able to break even. Eventually we couldn't even pay the printer, let alone the staff, so publication had to stop. The last issue appeared in 2002 as a PDF file and that was the end.

Still, it was clear from the vantage point of Prague that *Whole Earth* was an inspired team effort, thanks mainly to Stewart Brand's farsightedness, with great diverse input from a whole lot of other people. That doesn't happen often enough, so I'm extremely glad to have been part of it.

• • •

At the time of this interview, **Maria Kruglyak** [<https://mariakruglyak.org/>] was a curatorial intern at MAAT, helping to develop the exhibition "Visual Natures: The Politics and Culture of Environmentalism in the 20th and 21st Centuries" (27 March – 5 September 2022). She now edits *culturala* [<https://culturala.org/>], an art and cultural theory journal, and contributes regularly to *Contemporânea* [<https://contemporanea.pt/en>], a contemporary art magazine and website based in Portugal. She has a masters degree in art history from the University of London.

Robert Horvitz [<https://horvitz.multiplace.org/>] studied art at Yale, graduating with a BA degree in 1969, and went on to teach drawing and contemporary art at Yale, MIT, Rhode Island School of Design and Anglo-American University in Prague. After writing feature articles for *Artforum*, he joined *Whole Earth* in 1977 as art editor of their magazines before moving to Prague in 1991. He has exhibited his drawings at the Museum of Modern Art and the Clocktower in New York, the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston, the Akron Art Institute and elsewhere. In Prague, he mainly worked on the reform and development of electronic media and expansion of the internet.