

CS: I am definitely in a post internal-combustion world.

CL: Curtis is in a post internal-combustion world.

JS: So then the *Media Van* is now equipped for a post internal-combustion world, taken to its natural extreme.

CS: Yeah. And the thing I relate it to - there was this media van thing at the Santa Cruz Boardwalk. It looks just like a truck and you get in it there and they have a projector on the windshield and it shakes you around and simulates a ride. This was many years ago and I'm quite sure that the entire technology has got to a point where it's complete situation. Like for space simulations or pilots.

JS: I've been in one in Dresden, actually. It's this complete simulation at a Volkswagen factory where you sit inside a Volkswagen Phaeton and it simulates the ride. And the facility is just so over-the-top and hyper modern. White walls, white floors, glass, all the technicians wear white chemical suits. And they have this thing, if I remember correctly, it's the full car rigged up to a simulator.

CS: So you can drive along the Autobahn without leaving the factory? You could drive anywhere or any time.

JS: Why revisit the *Media Van* now in 2008?

BT: All of this was precipitated by the recent interest in Ant Farm. Before the show at Berkeley...

CL: (laughs) there was no interest!

BT: Ant Farm was off the radar. Then with that show and the catalog and the book with Felicity Scott, there's been this resurgence of interest in Ant Farm. There's also a broader cultural thing that's been happening too. Generally, people are starting to look back to the 60s and 70s and say 'what was going on then?' Some if it seems like it was cutting edge. It anticipates a lot of things that we value now while at the time it seemed radical or even counter-cultural. Now we take it for granted.

CS: And people are always looking for their history. Going back to Edison, it seems like the electronic world came so fast that we lose a sense of how it develops. Now, electronic space essentially has a reversible history because it's so easy to change. We can sculpt history. Museums also have changed. A lot of the 60s and 70s art took place at a time when the institutions that received them were much different characters. So, you know, it's essentially a revision of how we were as art consumers as well as a revision of the Ant Farm.

JS: And also...with what's popular right now. Chip, you joked about Facebook, but social networks and mobile living and Burning Man, these are all ideas that you were working with 30 years ago, although maybe not exactly in the same form.

BT: So this is all kind of an attempt at these kinds of utopian desires for somehow making things more perfect. I think there's a lot of idealism that's caught up in the Burning Man thing. And the idealism for the creators of these websites - from Myspace to Craigslist - there's a certain kind of idealism...

CL: At the Ant Farm, one of the first social networks we ever saw was the Airstream caravans. Apparently people who own Airstream trailers go on these caravans in the desert and park in these elliptical orbits and someone photographs it from the top. And because every Airstream trailer has a serial number on it, you can tell you were there.

JS: Wow. I've never heard of that.

CL: I wonder if they still do it. But one other thing I wanted to throw in there - to the question of 'why now?' - is that in 1973 there was the first energy crisis in the U.S. and the Arab oil embargo. And some of the things that we... I mean, that was a big moment and we were in the middle of it and we produced work that responded to it. So now we're in another moment, particular with global warming, when what might have been in the a smaller fringe movement in the 70's - well now everybody has to think of this issue of sustainabil-

ity and climate change and I think it makes sense to look at what was happening in the 70s.

BT: It's another assertion that those were issues that were accurately identified as mattering and it fell out of fashion in the 80s and the 90s.

CL: The Reagan years.

BT: Right. And the same question can be brought up with respect to why all the renewed interest in Buckminster Fuller. Buckminster Fuller was idolized by Ant Farm and a lot of other people who were active in the 70s and now everyone is revisiting him. What happened to Buckminster Fuller in the 80s and 90s? His work was complete at that point...

CS: That's Diaspora number two. Diaspora number one was the fact that he had this oeuvre of domes and houses that was taught in architecture school. And then suddenly he went of the charts because they would say that 'Mr. Fuller has gone on from these structures to do an inventory of world resources'. What? In architecture school in 1972, who could get their mind around the idea that a famous designer would launch into an activity like that?

CL: Simultaneously with the rise of Postmodernism. Post-modernism, as style, was dominating the schools for a while.

JS: While everything else just fell out of favor.

CS: He (Buckminster Fuller) wasn't interested in making buildings. He had too many ship analogies for architects to hold on to. I think they called it in Artforum 'benign paternalism.' That Mr. Fuller in his 60s could talk to these 18 year old hippies and they could make sense out of each other because of their shared understanding of the world. Then the hippies grew up and found that they didn't have to relate to this stuff and they didn't have to worry about this stuff. And now, now we all have to be environmentalists again.

JS: It's strange to think that the idea that architecture was more than buildings could possibly fall out of favor. It was taught to me as a way of thinking, not just a way to build or design. But going back to the idea of social network...It was conceived as a utopian idea to link cities but now, despite their utopian potential, people are corrupting it with the goal of getting famous.

CS: To have more fans than everyone else. You know, it started with Rock and Roll. The idea of fans is a pop phenomenon that's been around for years.

JS: But using networks like this to get famous is a new idea.

CL: Is the Internet a neutral delivery system that can connect people better or is it a marketing system? Those are the two poles. I wanted to add one thing about networking. Before we went on the road, we were doing mail art and we tapped into this network of people doing mail art. Mail art was like decorating the envelope, sending collages back and forth, the stamp becoming part of the art...

JS: Like Ray Johnson.

CL: Right. Ray Johnson was well known for that. Dana Atchley also went on the road and lived on the road and continued to gather images. He basically did what the *Media Van* did but kept doing it for ten or fifteen years. Before he did a project that connected this network of mail art people - it was called the Space Atlas

CL: There's a desire to create that network of affinity and, you know, shared purposes. And then the other network we started to connect with were the first generation of video porta-pack. Some were working as artists and some were working as alternative journalists.

JS: Again, that's like what's happening today with blogging and CNN iReports and everything. I mean, that's basically why I'm talking to you.

CL: The BBC and CNN, yeah, they have those links to send things in if you have something to report. There was a group that goes out to monitor the police with video cameras in

case there are any legal cases involving the police.

CS: The next generation of police-watchers will use very subtle body-mounted cameras. Maybe even old women walking around monitoring the cops.

BT: So it's all an attempt for these desires to... for some-how...things to be more.

JS: So let's talk about the *Media Van / Time Capsule*. You've installed a new - what you're calling a 'media huqqah' (pronounced 'hookah').

CS: Everyone wants an editor. We're essentially making a new kind of publication that has a due date thirty years from now.

BT: One thing that was interesting when doing research for the *Time Capsule* was this interview with an archaeologist about time capsules. This archaeologist cites Pompeii as perhaps the best time capsule ever. Part of what makes it useful as a cultural record of a time is that it's unbiased in its inclusion of everything.

JS: Even moments. Moments have been frozen in time.

BT: Exactly. Every aspect of daily life has been captured.

CS: They donated themselves to the time capsule

BT: So one of the things that happen with most time capsules is that it's a very self-conscious contribution by the participants. And in doing so, it diminishes greatly the value of it culturally. From an archaeologist's perspective you're not getting a lot of what you need to understand what was really going on at a particular time. So by implementing a random taking of files from people's devices, that choice is taken out of their hands.



Media Van in NIKE Missile Site SF-88, Sausalito, California, courtesy Jimmy Stamp.

JS: So you get a more accurate depiction of the time.

BT: And you get a lot of stray stuff that potentially more interesting than 'oh I really want a picture of my 3-year-old in there for the year 2030'. Not that that's less valuable but it just means that in our case there are lots of other stuff going into the time capsule that people wouldn't normally contribute. A lot of what's in the time capsule right now is pictures of the shows at the museum. And that's because people had been walking around all day taking pictures of the museum. If they were to choose to put pictures in, they probably wouldn't have chosen a picture of the didactic wall text from the exhibition, so there's that aspect, which I think, is interesting.

JS: Has anyone been shocked or surprised when they saw their receipt and realized what was taken? Maybe it was something they didn't want to share?

CL: I've seen people choose not to plug in when they realized the selection was random - for whatever reason.

BT: Yeah, there are quite a few people who didn't want to contribute when they realized they couldn't choose the file.

CL: The *media huqqah* also developed in a conversation that we had over the course of the year. One of the challenges we had was - because you have facebook and myspace and all these networks - how do we update the ideas of the networking that existed in the 70s when we were traveling in the van. We didn't want to compete with technology. We didn't want to do something that could better be done from home. So that led to us the traditional constraints of a time capsule that its a single physical object; you go there to make the donation as opposed to donating online, which of course gives them the possibility to choose what they're donating. It was a balance between what we don't want to do because it already exists in a more transparent and fluid form and the uniqueness that we wanted it to be an interesting object that's collecting these things, but a digital object because this is the digital age.

BT: But there's more. Because in that question of 'what can we do at a museum that you can't do at home?' - part of what we came to was the social environment.

JS: I was just going to say - because you call it a 'huqqah' instead of a 'time capsule', it has a more social connotation.

CL: That's right.

BT: Right. And so once we realized that the most important thing was creating a reason for people to come together in the museum and have a social interaction that they couldn't have at home. And so what could we introduce into the mix that would facilitate that social interaction. And there's the conflation of media technology with drug culture in the 70s and it's just this kind of swirling stew of ideas that are mutually reinforcing and not inconsistent. It all makes sense. Maybe that's why the van ended up at the NIKE Missile Silo in magazine B. There's this conflation of all that with military culture. In its original form, the *Media Van* drew heavily from the B-52 aesthetic.

JS: A sort of Cold War era military aesthetic.

CS: It was like military surplus. For a while, Ant Farm was listed as an educational institution and able to go to the military surplus depot in San Leandro and buy incredibly cheap military surplus supplies, including LeRoy, the trailer behind the van that you see in the old Ant Farm photos.

BT: So yeah. The conflation of militarism, power, activism, media, and mobility - all that stuff is part of the stew of the 60s and 70s.

JS: Despite the changes, it's still a 'Media Van.' It's still this documentation and information vehicle but you've made it accessible to people in 2008. You know, digital media is how we take our content with us now. But times have changed and I'd like to talk a little more about the idea of information as currency. In this 'new' *Media Van*, there's more of an idea of capitalism and information currency. Instead of exchanging ideas for services, you give the van something and get a receipt; a document that proves that a transaction occurred. Proof of the information exchange.

BT: For me that speaks to the difference of times. I'm just enough younger than these guys that I knew what was going on but I was too young to actually participate. So there was a certain resentment that I harbored in High School and in the first couple years of college, that I had missed the 60s and 70s.

CS: I was resentful that I couldn't liberate Paris from the Nazis. (laughs)

BT: And by the time I came on to the art scene, things have already changed wildly and it wasn't good enough to do something like a happening.

JS: It was more superficial?

BT: Well, the whole art scene had become professional.

CL: There was a shift to the market and guys making millions from their paintings.

BT: It wasn't good enough to participate from the joy of it. There was this commodification of art and the experience of art. It seems to me that now there's a hyper consumerism that exists vis-à-vis the Internet and it's not good enough to participate just for the joy of participating. We expect something in return. And there's this heightened level of exchange and expectation that seems to come with whatever we do.

JS: So you're satisfying people by giving them this note of value; this proof of exchange?

BT: I think it really does satisfy them. It's a very different transformative experience than if they had just contributed to the time capsule. If it just stopped right there...

CS: Well, the fact that it was random selection and this receipt verifies that this random selection was done is really the hot thing.

BT: And that affirmation...we seem to need that affirmation.

CS: We definitely need an affirmation.

BT: It's not good enough to trust and have the faith and hope that it's all ok and what I did is enough. Sitting in a space with people, laughing talking — that isn't good enough. I feel like that receipt makes it now.

CS: It proves that you were happy.

JS: (laughing) That's really sad.

CL: You know, people have been asking me "when are we going to see what's in the time capsule?" So now we're planning the closing event. So there'll be a focused moment where it will be turned around and donations will stop and we'll start displaying it. Probably during the last week of the exhibit.

JS: Then it goes into storage for 30 years. Are there any rules for what a time capsule can be?

BT: They don't lay out ground rules, but they lay out these questions are really formative. By filling out this form, it's leading you to the expectations for what a time capsule is. So in our case, we have a digital time capsule where we know that the best way to keep the files circulating is via the web. If you were to take that at face value as a way to preserve content for the future, then something like the street address for the time capsule gets thrown into the air. Do you now need a fixed location as a means to preserve that which you want to preserve? In fact, you don't. The best way to preserve digital files is to not have it in a fixed location. It's continuously moving. You want to keep it live. And that's one of the dilemmas the museum has. When we had this conversation early on with the museum about a time capsule, I didn't realize that the museum migrates their media collection every...

CL: 6 years.

BT: 6-10 years to the newest and most robust format.

CL: So if something started on 3/4" video would be transferred to beta-cam then digital beta-cam, then digital DV cam...

JS: But this isn't necessarily...their content. The media isn't theirs, the capsule is. The whole thing is.

BT: Well, that's debatable. It depends on the artist. Sometimes it's all about the media.

JS: But with the *Media Van*, the van, *huqquh*, and the media are the piece. It's not just a video or audio piece. So how important is it that the media stay in the *huqquh* and the *huqquh* stay in the van?

CS: There are alternatives, but ideally, it stays together: lock, stock and barrel.

BT: One of the important things to keep in mind is that with substantial resources and with the desire to preserve the content of the capsule, somebody else can do that better than we can.

JS: So you're ok with it changing formats over time? With the information leaving the *huqquh*?

BT: Or be lost. In the end, it is questionable: the value in 2030 of everything that happens to be in that time capsule. It's a little bit arrogant to presume that everything we do right now, everything which we're thinking about matters.

JS: But that's the idea. That as a whole, it all matters.

CS: It's arrogant to assume that it doesn't matter.

BT: You never know. You open yourself up that variable, that unknown. Is that part of the heritage of John Cage and the underpinnings of the show the piece is in? Of being open to forces greater than the will of the artist? Maybe it works, maybe it doesn't. It's like the *Citizen Time Capsule*. What if that were to be excavated today? What would it look like? Maybe a lot of it is rotted and indecipherable.

CS: It might become powder. Like our one time capsule that was exhumed - everything became this powder.

JS: The arsenic of time?

CS: The arsenic of time.

BT: The strength of re-exhibiting the *Media Van Time Capsule* is not diminished by that degradation. In fact, the poetry and the message of that is, I think, poignant.



Chip Lord, Curtis Schreier, Bruce Tomb, *Media Van v.08*, 2008, front view, drawing on vellum, 44" x 42", courtesy Gallery Paule Anglim, San Francisco.

The *Media Van v.08 (Time Capsule)* is currently on view as part of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art exhibition *The Art of Participation: 1950 to Now*. It can be seen until February 8th, at which time it will be 'buried' until the year 2030.

'For the truth is that at some level, whether it's conscious or not, time capsules are intended less as messages from ourselves to the future than messages from ourselves to ourselves.' - sociologist Albert Bergeson.

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