

Adversaries, Inc.

Inherent flaw at the heart of it, no heart just flaw.

Flawed systems. They abound. Some of these we want, others we don't. Many are so enmeshed in our lives, in the tools that make up our lives, that it's hard to imagine any other option than pushing all the detritus through to some end, some terminus of doom (does anyone believe in Utopia?). Always easier to destroy, right? Clocks tick in silence. Our televisual fantasies are nostalgic or apocalyptic, plotting formulas vetted to tug at our grasping need for a cathartic resolution that flees toward the horizon in our daily lives. The horror, the horror. Television was made for rockets and RADAR (shield us from the real). The technological systems we use on a daily, often minute-by-minute, second-to-second basis to communicate, create, entertain, study, protest, promote are derived from centralized, authoritarian systems (or technics -L. Mumford) of organization that were for the most part developed under military contract. Our gizmos are all intellectual army/navy surplus. When we attempt to launch democratic movements, we fall back on authoritarian systems to mobilize. We make use of the internet, that child of the DoD (see ARPANET). The distributed network was a concept of RAND Corp. (Paul Baran), developed to support communication systems in the event of nuclear war. The first High-Performance-Computers were constructed following the system architecture created by individuals like John von Neumann, a politically conservative cynic, who advocated for a preemptive nuclear strike on the Soviet Union, as a form of "preventive war" or nuclear blackmail, so that ultimately the Soviets would acquiesce to a U.S.-dominated world state. "If you say why not bomb them tomorrow, I say why not today? If you say today at 5 o'clock, I say why not one o'clock." (Neumann) This confrontational approach to conflict informed Neumann's game theory, influential in military strategy and economics, which was based around the concept that all adversaries are self-interested and that all conflicts boil down to a zero-sum game (the only way to win is for someone else to lose). Control, self-enforced, and guaranteed by greed and distrust. Neumann's Mathematical Analyzer, Numerator, Integrator, and Computer (MANIAC) was constructed at the Los Alamos Scientific Laboratory for the purpose of calculating the thermonuclear process.

The Bomb, and the adversarial culture that arose with it, fed our art, our design, our graphic interfaces, our vectored CAD and CAM, our animated forms of entertainment. Pollock pulled his hair out thinking about how to paint after the Bomb. The Lincoln Lab at MIT was a byproduct of the Semi-Automatic Ground Environment (SAGE) project. The Lab's TX-2 Computer, one piece of the SAGE system, was used by Ivan Sutherland (student of C. Shannon) to create his "Sketchpad," the first graphical computer interface, clearing the way for Pixar and Adobe Systems, Inc., both companies headed/founded by former Sutherland students/employees.

The Bomb looms behind as well as before. Between 1945 and 1963 above ground tests of the nuclear bomb doubled the amount of carbon-14 in our atmosphere. This fallout is in our bones. We carry the Bomb with us literally, it dates us (Bomb pulse dating). Scientists recently used pulse dating to establish the age of a Greenland shark (400 years old!).

Sean Paul (b. 1978, Salt Lake City, UT) lives and works in New York. His work has been exhibited internationally at the Whitney Museum of American Art, NY; Hessel Museum of Art, Annadale-on-Hudson, NY; Art | 38 | Basel, Art Premiere (Two-person exhibition with Cheyney Thompson), Basel, Switzerland; Le Confort Moderne, Centre pour l'Art Contemporain, Poitiers; Centro Cultural Andratx, Mallorca, Spain; COMA, Berlin; Fondazione Guiliani, Rome, Italy ; Front Desk Apparatus, New York; David Lewis, New York; Campoli Presti, Paris, France; Sutton Lane, London; Galleria Massimo De Carlo, Milan, Italy; Blum & Poe, Los Angeles, CA; Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York; Gavin Browns Enterprise, New York; Elizabeth Dee Gallery, New York; Thomas Duncan Gallery, Los Angeles, CA; among others. His work is included in the permanent collection of the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.