

“Ça chauffe dans la rue”
L’espace public face à l’urgence climatique

Quelques réflexions liminaires sur le contexte

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Journée Rue de l’Avenir
Yverdon, 2 Octobre 2020





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COINCIDENCE

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VILLA SUBURBANA

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AGRITECTURE

NATURE TO MAIRK

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BANISM

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A6

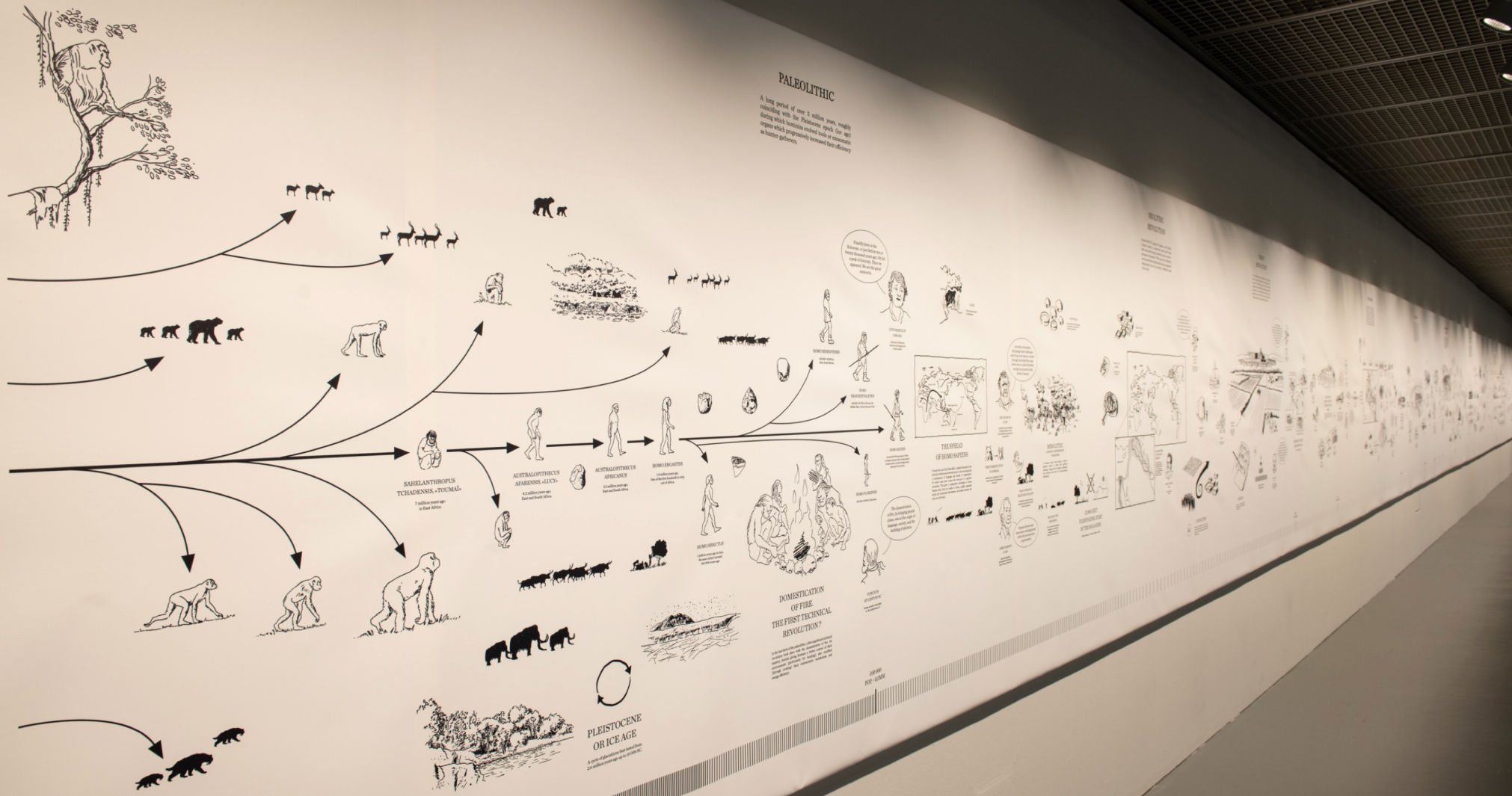


BRUNNEN: ANTIQUARIAT
Gartenbau, Brunnengarten, Pils



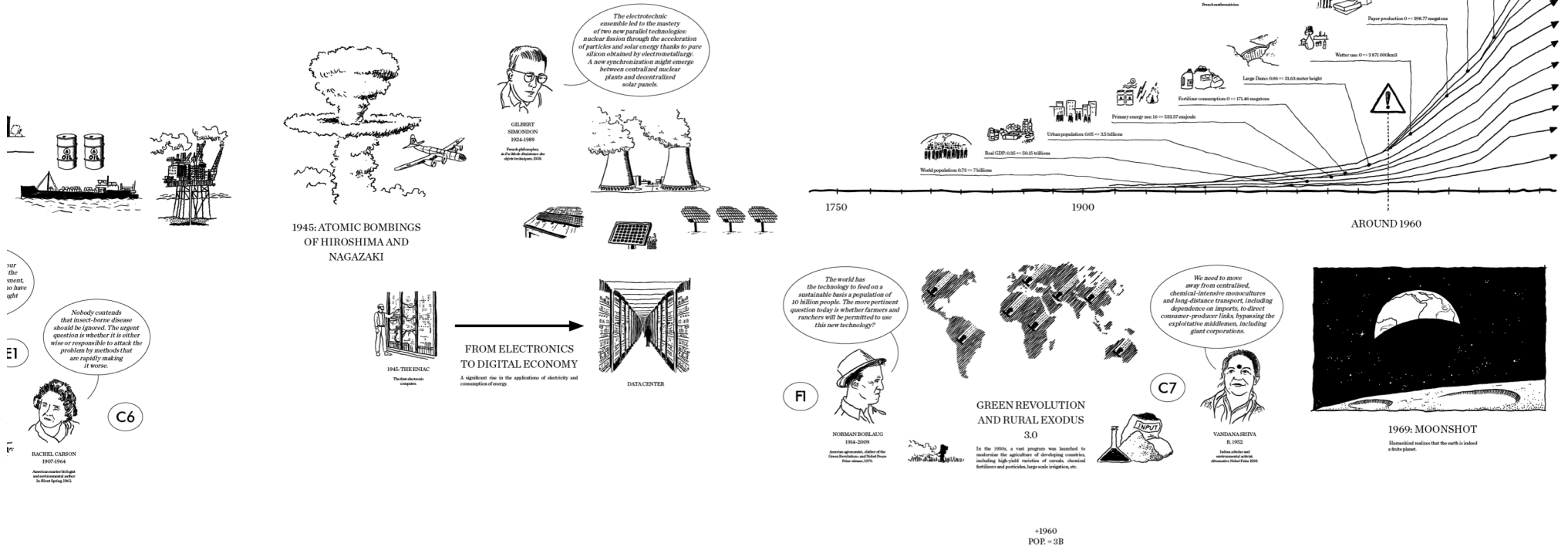
PALEOLITHIC

A long period of over 3 million years, roughly coinciding with the Pleistocene epoch (see left) during which humans evolved into a dominant species which progressively increased their efficiency as hunter-gatherers.



THE GREAT ACCELERATION

Since the nuclear ending of World War II, the globalization of market economy and capitalism, powered by the relentless mobilization of new forms of unconventional fossil energy sources, launched a spectacular and exponential rise in the global (though very uneven) consumption of all fundamental resources. Most unfortunately, in an edifying illustration of the rebound effect, it seems that most smart technological innovations which could supposedly moderate or revert this acceleration are in fact aggravating it.



Whereas some see the metropolis and metropolitan congestion as way out of the environmental predicament (by reducing the physical footprint of human settlements), the fact that the growing urbanization of our planet went on a par with a steady aggravation of all major environmental issues (affecting soils, water, climate, biodiversity and "peak oil") is hardly disputable. This has led many scientists, thinkers or activists to question not only the industrial technologies, routines, models, and "economies of scales" that have prevailed for over two centuries, but also the political and social modes of "governance" through which our territories are being organized and managed.

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2008: “FUTURE SCENARIOS”



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A USEFUL COMPASS FOR NAVIGATING THE 21ST CENTURY

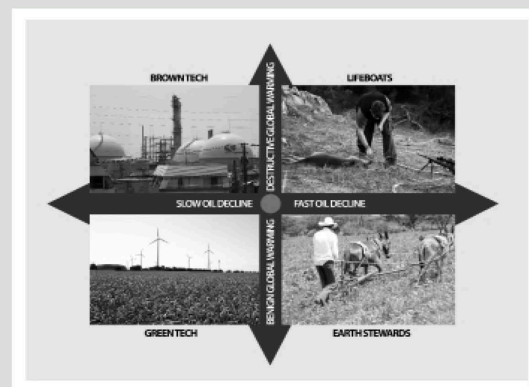
Permaculture's political relevance beyond the domestic scale is often questioned. Indeed, permaculturists are more doers than *indignados*. But this does not proceed from some kind of internal exile and Holmgren's contributions to the understanding of the wider context are quite exemplary. His *Future Scenarios* (2008) contrasts four views of the future: Techno-explosion (new sources of dense energy, space conquest), Techno-stability (sustainable development, solar panels), Collapse (a degrading into survivalism), and Descent (a succession of crises and plateaus progressively unwinding the industrial era). A keen reader of Odum, Holmgren sees Descent as the most plausible, and likely to be driven by the interaction of two processes: peak oil and climate change.

Since each of those two processes may unfold either slowly or rapidly, this opens up four possible mid-term scenarios: 1. *Brown-Tech* – slow energy descent and severe climate change, leading to strong state interventionism; 2. *Green-Tech* – slow energy descent and mild climate change which allows a planned transition towards “sustainable development”; 3. *Earth-Steward* – severe energy descent and mild climate change which is conducive to urban exodus and local resilience; and 4. *Lifboats* – fast energy descent and severe climate change which is causing a devolution of large social organizations into a constellation of competing tribes, gangs and feudal lords.

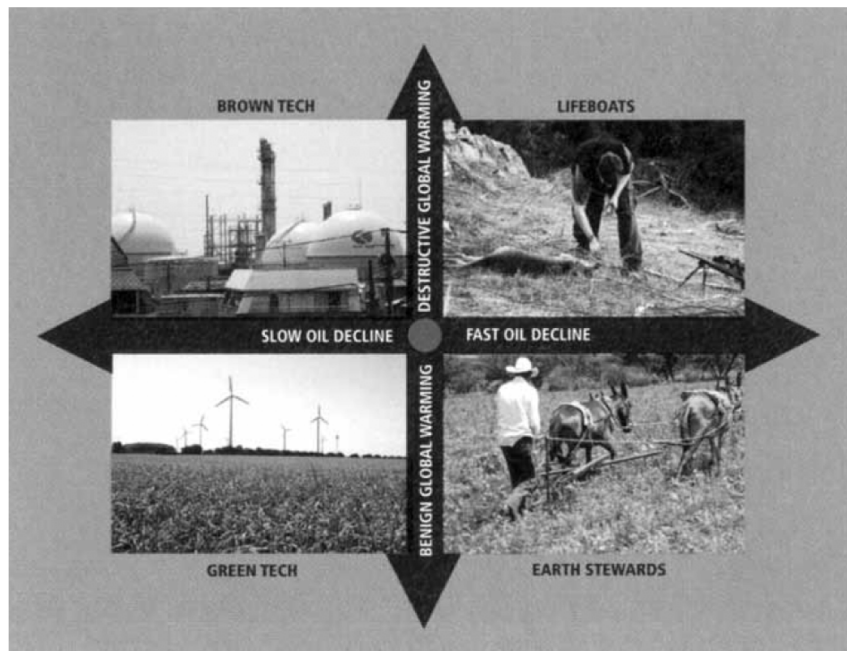
In Holmgren's view, these scenarios are not mutually exclusive; they may well develop next to one another or even within one another. They are also dynamically linked: while *Green-Tech* would sooner or later morph into *Earth-Steward*, it is likely that *Brown-Tech* would finally explode into *Lifboats*. Hence Holmgren's point: if permaculture corresponds to the *Earth-Steward* scenario, it is also relevant to the *Green Tech*, and probably the most hopeful way of anticipating a dark age of *Lifboats*.

David Holmgren,
*Future Scenarios: How Can Communities Adapt to
Peak Oil and Climate Change?*
Chelsea Green, 2009.

- 1 ABCD Scenarios on the impact of energy transitions and converging crisis
Andrew Merritt, 2009
EcoLabs / J. Bochuert
- 2 Quadrants
Future Scenarios, David Holmgren, 2008.



2



Les quatre scénarios mondiaux de changement climatique et de descente énergétique.

Scénarios de descente

DAVID HOLMGREN

La planification par scénarios

3

L'approche systémique du futur de la descente énergétique peut être poussée plus loin en recourant à un modèle de prévision par scénarios croisant deux variables fondamentales qui, largement indépendantes l'une de l'autre, génèrent quatre scénarios, chacun occupant l'un des quadrants d'un diagramme conceptuel. Ces scénarios sont des récits plausibles et intrinsèquement cohérents sur le futur qui peuvent aider les organisations et les individus à développer, dans un contexte foncièrement imprévisible, une grande faculté d'adaptation.

Dans la planification par scénario qu'adoptent classiquement les entreprises, les deux variables pourraient être le taux de croissance de l'économie en général et le cadre réglementaire qui contraint ou encourage les affaires. Mais c'est le recours que fit la Shell Oil Company à la planification par scénarios qui rendit la méthode fameuse. Avant les crises du pétrole, l'entreprise avait utilisé la planification par scénarios pour repérer tout un éventail de scénarios susceptibles de menacer la compagnie, y compris l'éventualité d'un embargo sur le pétrole. Grâce à l'analyse des indicateurs et des conséquences, l'entreprise fut capable de réagir rapidement et proactivement à la crise, et plus efficacement que les autres compagnies pétrolières.

Le changement climatique et le déclin de la production pétrolière

BROWN TECH



DESTRUCTIVE GLOBAL WARMING

LIFEBOATS



SLOW OIL DECLINE



BENIGN GLOBAL WARMING

FAST OIL DECLINE



GREEN TECH

EARTH STEWARDS



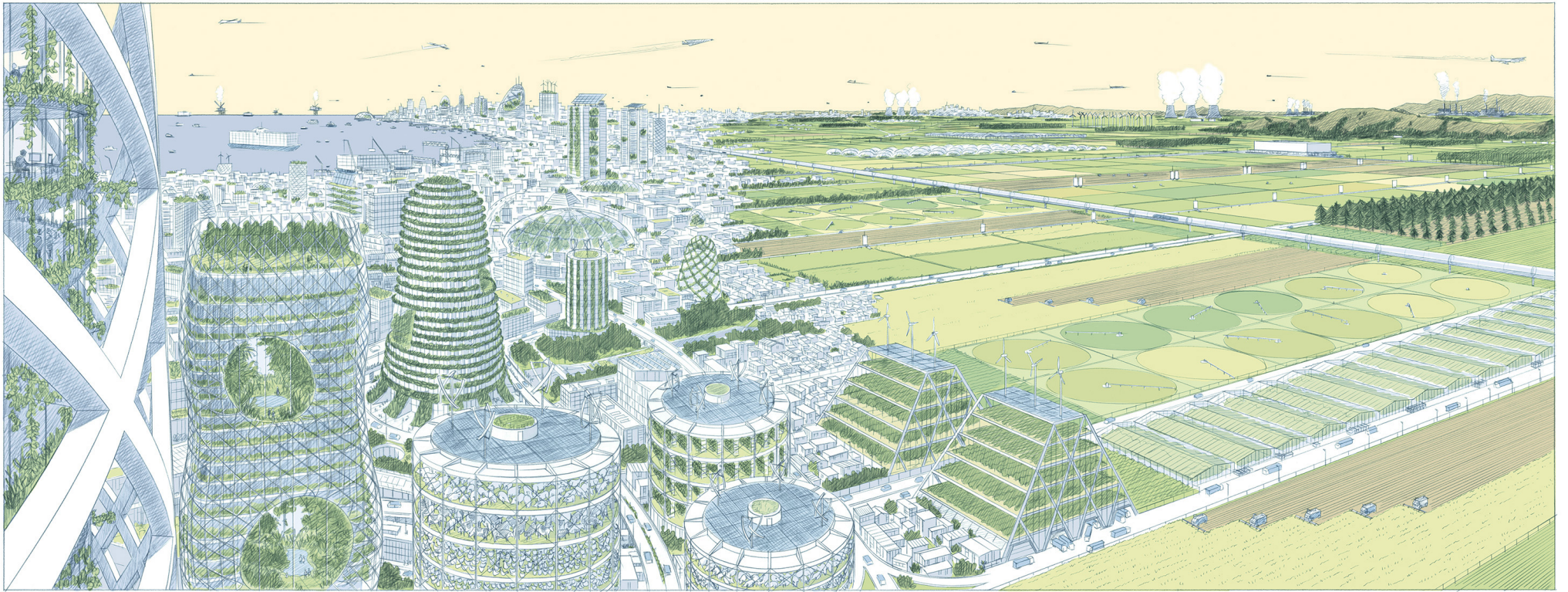
INCORPORATION

THE HIGHLY CAPITALISTIC METROPOLIS ABSORBS AGRICULTURE

What if the industrialisation of agriculture and its subjection to capitalism were logically leading to its urbanisation, or *incorporation* by the metropolis? Such is more or less the common accelerationist belief of those who, confronted with the dire environmental consequences of industrialised agriculture, imagine that the remedy is in the poison, and that only a flight forward into high-tech innovation and concentration may hold the key to a globally liveable future. Mega glasshouses, vertical farms, high-rise feedlot buildings: thanks to the breakthrough and disruptive technologies of soilless culture, hydroponics and closed-system recycling, agricultural productions liberate their vast outlying peri-urban footprints to concentrate into biological reactors or fast-breeders, agri-buildings of agri-cities which turn synanthropic plant and animal species into cohabitants of the metropolitan Noah's Arch.

In this perspective, much embraced by the champions of eco-modernism, eco-pragmatism and agri-tecture (who are also clearly experts in hybrid linguistics), the metropolis is clearly envisioned not just as the *manifest destiny* of mankind, but also as the ultimate condition of our whole biosphere. Meanwhile, the dense city acts as a control tower surveying Countryside 2.0, consisting of a grid of robotised *latifundias*, interspersed with patches of productive forests, mines, natural preserves, and escapist leisure resorts, all scientifically managed by an army of experts. This ethos of concentration is well expressed by Stewart Brand in his *Whole Earth Discipline* (2008): "One emergent principle might be that deleterious elements should be concentrated. Concentrating people in cities is good. Concentrating energy waste products like nuclear spent fuel in casks is an improvement over distributing the greenhouse gases from spent coal and oil in the atmosphere. Concentrating our sources of food and fibre into high-yield agriculture, tree plantations, and mariculture frees up more wildland and wild ocean to carry out their expert Gaian tasks."

Many architects (to say nothing of engineers) seem tempted by this flight forward into what critic Peder Anker calls "cabin ecology", and dream (like its prophets, such as Buckminster Fuller) to precipitate the metabolism of calories in systems and circuits as closed, looped and controlled as possible. The term incorporation connotes the sur-rationalist absorption of agriculture by architectural and urban engineering as well as its ultimate subjection to the economic models of concentrated investment and management of hyper-capitalism.



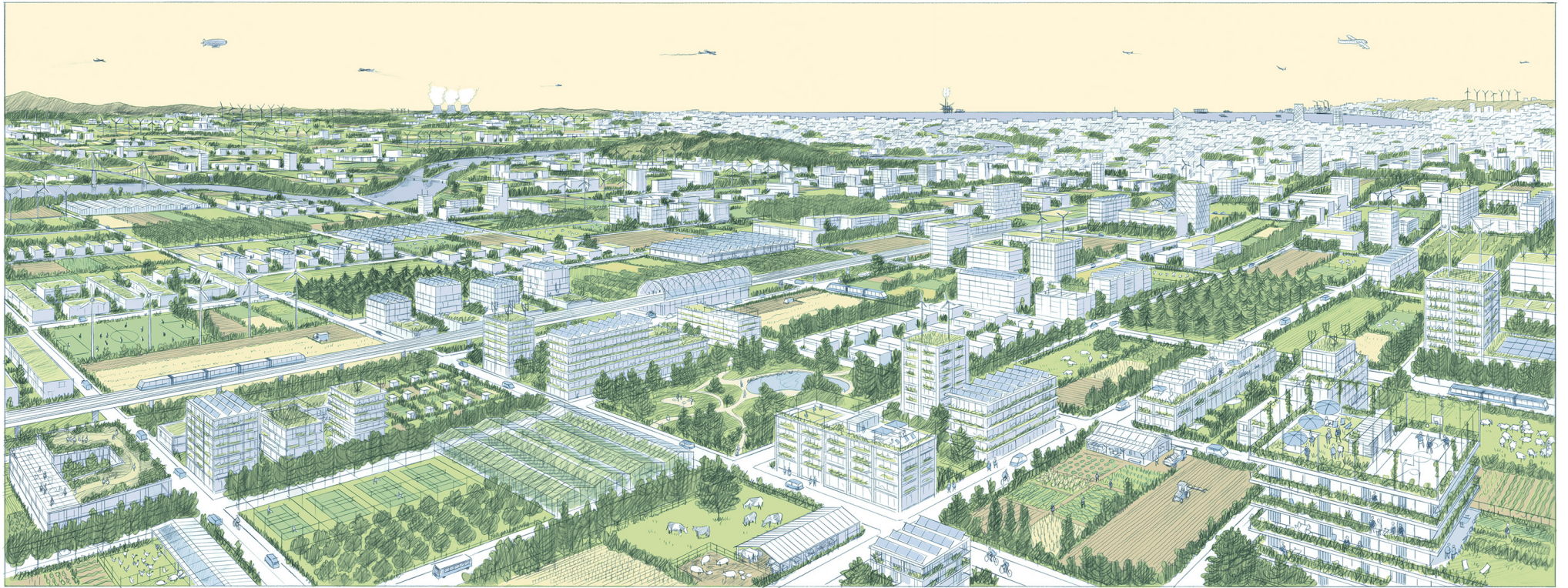
NEGOTIATION

AGRICULTURE BECOMES AN INTEGRAL COMPONENT OF URBAN EXTENSIONS

This is the latent narrative of what we might call agricultural urbanism (in counterpoint to urban agriculture). Cities and metropolises take up spaces and species of agricultural production as integral components in the design of their margins and extensions. In this perspective, which challenges the modern demarcation line between urban, natural and agricultural zones, the latent capacities of agriculture, husbandry, horticulture and forestry to evolve arenas of consociation are hired by planning to foster an evolution of urban forms, syntaxes and modes of production. Park-orchards or park-nurseries, market-gardens, housing developments, open campuses which mix education, agroecology and various activities, eco and agro-districts, greenbelts or corridors of agroforestry, etc.: the list goes on and on of the new hybrid species that combine the best interests of cities and agriculture. These counter the deleterious dynamics of the metabolic rift between city and country and might also erode the persistent frontier between main job, secondary occupation and leisure activities.

Whereas this scenario may appear to be in its infancy today, it can claim some precedent in contemporary agro-ecology, and indeed there is a whole history of jurisprudence in the tradition and models of pre-modernist urban design; the agro-urban ideas and experiments that once converged around the concept of *civic design*. Weren't Olmsted's park systems, Howard's garden cities, Migge's Siedlungen, Geddes' Biopolis, Wright's Broadacre, etc., attempts at defining the figures and structures of an *agropolitan* future (to use a term that geographer John Friedman coined to describe certain regions of Asia)? Might it be time to resume their efforts by devising new contracts at all scales, "new deals", new forms of negotiation between urban and rural practices, that could restructure and give resilience to the *citta diffusa* that has spread and keeps spreading over entire regions?

Unsurprisingly, several of today's most influential approaches and trends in urban design, such as "landscape urbanism" or "ecological urbanism", more or less embrace this narrative of negotiation. They thus promote the idea of a horizontal metropolis which, far from containing and densifying the city against a backdrop of nature and agriculture, strive on the contrary to integrate and nurture the latter within the metropolitan fabric and field. Whether this narrative will succeed in de-simplifying urbanism and evolving more varied and polycultural syntaxes of co-existence, or will be merely hijacked as an alibi for the greedy and relentless growth of urbanisation, is an important, open question.



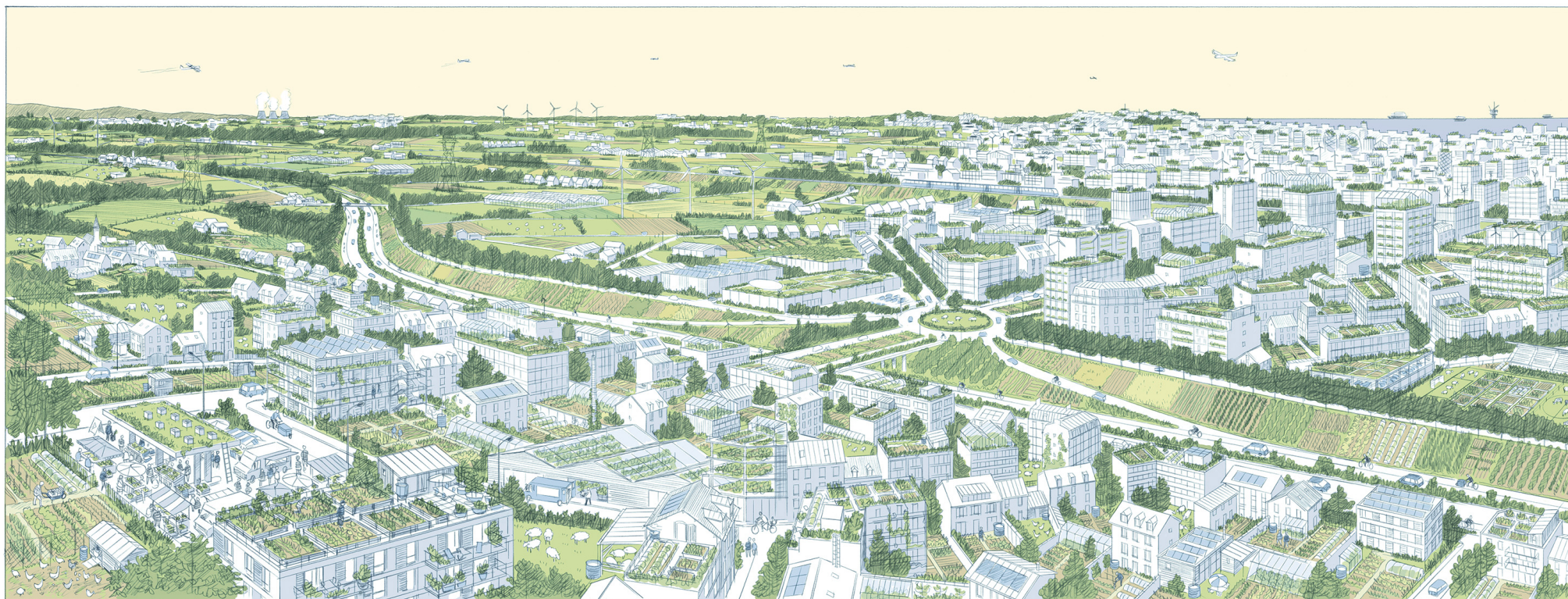
INFILTRATION

AGRICULTURE AND HORTICULTURE INVADE THE CITY

There is an underlying narrative to the work of those who take advantage of the neglected surfaces of cities and metropolises—such as roofs, terraces, vacant lots, median strips or sidewalks—to reintroduce horticulture and feeder gardening within the urban landscape; but also those who, reviving the practices of market gardening, build-up local networks that bypass the circuits of large-scale food business and retail. Without undermining the logic and realities of the urban condition, but rather by exploiting the latter's numerous niches, gaps and discrepancies, these varied initiatives take hold of food cultivation and consumption (and of their reintegration in local or short supply chains) as a means of building up collectives and solidarity-based practices in the uprooted territories of the metropolis.

Whether they proceed through direct integration with the fabric of the city, or through subscription to mixed-farming ventures and co-ops in the hinterland, these approaches all tend more or less to stimulate a higher degree of local interaction in urban territories which might evolve into a constellation of commons. Although it may be encouraged or faked by local authorities, infiltration is essentially a bottom-up phenomenon, an opportunistic and *ad-hoc* logic of self-organisation that does not pertain to planning or urbanism but blossoms here and there, like weeds, in the faults and gaps of urban territories. However, in contexts of severe economic decline or breakdown, such as the ones faced by La Havana (and Cuba in general) during the Special Period, or the City of Detroit after the collapse of its automobile industry, this phenomenon may obviously take on the dimensions of a landslide and significant recapture of urban plots by individual or collective food cultivation practices.

Since economic and energy crises are likely to strike a growing number of large metropolises and urban regions in the near future, and expand the amount of fallow urban areas, one may expect this scenario of infiltration (i.e. unplanned agricultural reclaiming of urban ecosystems and their suburban extensions) to become less and less like acupuncture and increasingly spread over larger metropolitan territories where it would evolve a variety of “rurban” fabrics, forms and syntaxes. How those will coexist with the palimpsests of surviving species and figures of the metropolis, and their struggle for existence, is anyone's guess.



SECESSION

“IL FAUT CONSTRUIRE L’HACIENDA”

This is the more radical perspective of those who question the current hegemony of metropolitics, and hence the ability of urbanism to organise and maintain the eco-political conditions of resilient and satisfying worlds. From the overwhelming evidence gathered on the dire environmental, climatic, energetic and social consequences of consumer society and capitalistic concentration—of which metropolises and their touristic satellites are both the magnets and the most obvious products—the critics of the current politics of urban governance conclude that metropolitan territories are fundamentally unsustainable, doomed to collapse sooner or later, and that what is needed is for communities, by freeing themselves from their orbit and modes of “governance”, to anticipate (if not accelerate) their progressive marginalisation and dismantling.

In this narrative of decentralisation, geared towards building means to achieve a significant degree of local autonomy, the principles of coexistence and the techniques of design and cultivation that enable people to tend a living landscape, a resilient community of interdependent humans, plants and animals, *supplant* urbanism. Alongside several other movements hinted at in this exhibition, from agrarianism to libertarian municipalism, permaculture is among the most disciplined expression of the agenda that would turn territories into confederations of self-managed communes or worlds.

Designating these experiments of non-urban foundation or re-foundation as *secession* may seem excessive. Many of these experiments are not necessarily framed as the antithesis to the metropolitan ethos but sometimes as simple offshoots or havens of “transition”. Most, of course, must accept a certain compromise or *modus vivendi* with the rules and mechanisms of metropolitan governance. Besides, all of them may be more or less tolerated as “enclaves”, or even hijacked and promoted as the prodigal offspring of a metropolis always eager to absorb contradiction by celebrating its own ecumenism.

But three things must be here underlined. Firstly, there is a growing conviction with which these initiatives are dissociating themselves from the narrative of urbanisation as the manifest destiny of humankind. Secondly, there is a strong curiosity amongst participants in these initiatives in how to learn from one another, which turns them into the most active and prospective research centres. Finally, there is an intelligence and energy that participants manage to draw from the positive faith (or at least from the suspension of disbelief) that other natural covenants are eminently desirable, possibly achievable, and absolutely necessary.

In other words, what unites them in their very diversity, is their collective intuition that salvaging the idea of *civitas*, and giving it a new meaning, now badly requires a sub-version of and an exodus from the metropolis.

