

17 May 2004

++ G L O B A L B R A N D I N G ++

Part 1 : The Past

A Condensed Biography of Stewart Brand as Model Global
Citizen

including the Whole Earth Catalog, Computer Games and
Extended Scenarios

Let's see how many links I can cram in one fairly relevant
sentence...

--from the homepage of Stewart Brand (<http://www.well.com/user/sbb/>)

High on his rooftop in North Beach, San Francisco 1966, after ingesting a mild dose of LSD, Stewart Brand imagined the subtle curvature of the earth as he gazed at the surrounding high-rises, noticing that they were not really parallel and the further that you might view them from, the more extreme the curve until finally, viewed from space, the Earth would resolve to a perfectly spherical marble, not dissimilar from the finite planet that Buckminster Fuller had been insisting we must all understand if we are ever to get civilization on this planet right, something Stewart Brand had been considering since his initial undergraduate coursework in biology at Stanford followed by his studies in design and photography at San Francisco Art Institute in 1962 which led him to spending three years on various Indian reservations in the American West, culminating in the multi-media event that he produced called AMERICA NEEDS INDIANS, 1964 while simultaneously engaged by a growing interest in the Space Program at a time when the Left was deeply suspicious of this Defense Industry initiative;

so he tuned in,
turned on
and dropped out

joining Ken Kesey's band of Merry Pranksters (see TWO IDEOLOGIES on page xx of this issue) which he professed to find mind opening and indirectly led to the profound conceptual leap described previously -- imagining a picture of the whole earth from space and understanding its political-aesthetic implications -- which inspires him to begin, immediately the next morning,

making buttons that ask,

WHY HAVEN'T WE SEEN A PHOTOGRAPH OF THE WHOLE EARTH YET?

and distributing these paranoically stated provocations widely, sending unsolicited packages to scientists, secretaries of state, astronauts, and famous thinkers like Marhall McLuhan and Bucky Fuller (whose humbling response was "Well, you can only see about half the earth at any given time." [Laughs]) nonetheless undeterred these buttons and the wider campaign was picked up by newspapers, magazines and the popular imagination (reputedly) leading NASA to release full color photographs of the Earth from the Apollo missions beginning in 1969 by which time Brand had named and started work on the WHOLE EARTH CATALOG whose inaugural issue in the Summer of 1969 featured the afore-mentioned photograph and whose subsequent covers also rigorously retained a photograph of the Earth from space, creating a remarkable series of covers

formed by a repeated image

and a specific cultural framework,

and that Apollo 9 astronaut Rusty Schweickart, as head of the Appilcations department of the National Aeronautic Space Administration through persistent efforts, could not convince the scientific community at-large of these Earth images that 'you couldn't see anything useful from space', an idea directly at odds with the stated FUNCTION (and selection criteria) of the WHOLE EARTH CATALOG printed on the inside front cover (reverse of the globe), Fall, 1969:

The WHOLE EARTH CATALOG functions as an evaluation and access device.

With it, the user should know better what is worth getting and where and how to do the getting.

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

- 1) Useful as a tool,
- 2) Relevant to independent education,
- 3) High quality or low cost,
- 4) Easily available by mail.

CATALOG listings are continually revised according to the experience

and suggestions of CATALOG users and staff.

and meanwhile, continuing his agenda to provide Access To Tools (the subtitled mission of the WHOLE EARTH CATALOG), Stewart Brand helped Doug Engelbart design and organize what was later to be dubbed the MOTHER OF ALL DEMOS, Augmented Human Intellect, at the Fall Joint Computer Conference in San Francisco which introduced such occasionally useful and intimately

familiar personal computing paradigms as the mouse, linked text, windows, copying, pasting and continuing to edit, publish and direct the WHOLE EARTH CATALOG through several revisions (pictured on subsequent pages) until 1972 with publication of THE LAST WHOLE EARTH CATALOG (which was never intended to persist, only to get the word out there and adequately review the existing tools and resources for interested parties to use) with Scott Beach, he organized THE DEMISE PARTY to mark the end of the WHOLE EARTH CATALOG and engaged the

1500 guests

with

\$20,000 in cash

that were proceeds from four years of producing the catalog and providing access to tools for a mini-generation, so that by dawn the entire cash proceeds had been released to various parties, organizations and individuals to 'do good with'; a notion that Mr. Brand set out to explore himself following the precedent established by the Beatles on May 15, 1968 when they formed Apple Corps to distribute funds to myriad artistic ventures -- and self-described as "a kind of Western communism" -- by founding the Point Foundation in 1972, and successfully giving away over \$1 Million Dollars to assorted worthy individuals over course of the next three years while working on a 1972 article for Rolling Stone (photographed by Annie Leibowitz) titled FANATIC LIFE & SYMBOLIC DEATH AMONG THE COMPUTER BUMS, which detailed the then fringe computer research and game playing being undertaken at Xerox PARC, the Stanford Artificial Intelligence Laboratory and MIT, in which a SPACEWAR tournament was staged,

with numerous bearded computer visionaries enjoying
the visceral delights of free beer and computer games

while exploring something else entirely -- the useful exercise of thinking the world as a dynamically regulated and organic computational system, a topic that Brand investigated in his book published by Random House (by the way, a publishing house established in 1925, when Bennett Cerf and Donald Klopfer decided to publish 'a few books on the side at random' and that successfully defended the first U.S. publication of James Joyce's Ulysses) which introduced fellow biologist Gregory Bateson into the ongoing discourse around self-organizing systems, feedback loops and computer science through his book titled: TWO CYBERNETIC FRONTIERS, which led, of course, to editing SPACE COLONIES (Penguin, 1976) and serving as an advisor to California governor Edmund G. Brown from 1976-1979 while acquiescing to publish THE NEXT WHOLE EARTH CATALOG in 1981, the peak edition with a sizeable advance contract and powerful distribution, and encouraged Stewart to engage the problems, consequences and opportunities at hand in the world of business which he did on the faculty and Western Behavioral Institute of La Jolla, California and with UNCOMMON COURTESY: SCHOOL OF COMPASSIONATE SKILLS which gave courses in subjects like Business as Service and Street Saint Skills, and whose instructions Mr. Brand continued to practice in subsequent publications insisting:

It's our custom to print--and try to explain-- our finances in each of our publications... Business, we found, does best when performed as service.

Service does best as service when it's approached as business.
--p 200, WHOLE EARTH SOFTWARE CATALOG, 1984

and building on the WHOLE EARTH legacy to its (some would say) inevitable evolution as a review of the personal computer softwares becoming widely available, and providing access to tools for a broad range of non-specialists who might soon find themselves tapping at their keyboards, electronically chatting to each other in the pioneering online telecommunications computer bulletin board system that Stewart Brand founded called

THE WELL
(or
Whole Earth 'Lectronic Link),

an often cited and foundational precedent for the INTERNET, a global electronic network started in 1968 by the Advanced Research Projects Agency of the United States Department of Defense to link scientists in San Diego, Los Angeles and Champaign-Urbana, Illinois which, showing no signs of slowing down, is connecting uncountable locations (real and imaginary) across the whole earth today and is the de-facto topic of a conference that Brand co-founded with Kevin Kelley (later of Wired magazine) called THE HACKERS' CONFERENCE, televised since its creation in 1986 and organizing a loose-knit group of software tinkerers, hardware mechanics and social engineers for exchange and disagreement; the former Merry Prankster followed up as a visiting scientist at the Media Lab at MIT in 1986 (later writing a book about his experience there), a consultant with Royal Dutch/Shell London where he pioneered techniques of long-term scenario planning (which he develops to a somewhat more concrete form in THE CLOCK OF THE LONG NOW, a project with Brian Eno to design a very, very slow clock, which was dealt with in the previous issue of this magazine and will be revisited in the next) that encourage good behavior, global responsibility and social tendencies for the world's corporations, an idea that Brand extended by founding the GLOBAL BUSINESS NETWORK to explore whole futures and extended scenarios for world economies based on the behaviors of its global corporate citizens and ending up back where this sentence started, on the roof of Stewart Brand's North Beach apartment, tripping on LSD and trying to work out how we might think the world differently if only we could see a photograph of the whole earth.

We can't put it together. It is together.

--back cover, THE LAST WHOLE EARTH CATALOG

In the Next Issue:

++ G L O B A L B R A N D I N G ++
Part 2 : The Future

An extraordinarily slow clock and some questions to Stewart Brand about the future.

Illustrations:

Presented on the following pages are covers and interior spreads from THE WHOLE EARTH CATALOG, edited by Stewart Brand.

1.

Cover

WHOLE EARTH CATALOG, Fall 1969
(small earth, little moon)

2.

Back Cover

WHOLE EARTH CATALOG, Fall 1969
(small earth with type underneath it saying 'closer' and type extending from it that says 'FURTHER')

3.
Cover
WHOLE EARTH CATALOG, Access to Tools, Fall 1970
4.
Spread from Communications, pp. 62-63
WHOLE EARTH CATALOG, Access to Tools, Fall 1970
5.
cover
THE LAST WHOLE EARTH CATALOG, 1971?
6.
first spread, with "The flow of energy through a system acts to organize that system."
THE LAST WHOLE EARTH CATALOG, 1971?
7.
cover
THE LAST Updated WHOLE EARTH CATALOG, 1972?
8.
back cover, with picture of globe and "We can't put it together. It is together."
THE LAST Updated WHOLE EARTH CATALOG, 1972?
9.
front cover
THE NEXT WHOLE EARTH CATALOG, 1981?
10.
cover (actually this is less visually interesting and could go away easily)
THE WHOLE EARTH SOFTWARE CATALOG