

CARSON CHAN &
MATTHEW
WAGSTAFFE
American
Architecture and
Environmental
Anxieties Before
Climate Change

in conversation with

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R. Buckminster Fuller (American, 1895–1983), *The World Game*, 1964–82. Sketch of the World Game facility, c. 1967. Pen, magazine cutout, and correction fluid on paper. Artist unknown. Stanford Libraries, Special Collections and University Archives. R. Buckminster Fuller Papers

In her 1962 bestseller *Silent Spring*, Rachel Carson cast a suspicious eye on modern technology, arguing that, with the development of synthetic pesticides, humankind was enacting changes on its environment that outpaced its natural ability to adapt. While many designers and activists shared these anxieties, a number of American architects in the postwar period believed, contra Carson, that saving the natural world from technology's ills required, paradoxically, that our built environment become even *more* infused with the technological, whether it be through cybernetically adaptive building materials, the deployment of bespoke digital design tools, or even via overlaying the entire globe with a satellite-enabled resource tracking system. Although the majority of these projects preceded the widespread understanding of anthropogenic climate change, these designers' dreams of combating environmental degradation via computational control have—for good or for ill—laid the groundwork for much climate-sensitive architecture today.