



SHOEMAKER'S DIALOGUES

1

Simon the shoemaker.

From May 4 -14, 2011, San Francisco art collective, Futurefarmers created a nine-day "urban thinkery" centered around a shoemaker's atelier consisting of a cobbler's bench and shoe racks and installed in the Guggenheim Museum's Rotunda in New York. The atelier is an open interpretation of Simon the Shoemaker's Fifth-century Athens studio in which Socrates supposedly had extensive philosophical discussions with Simon and local youth. These dialogues included conversations with poets, activists, anthropologists and scientists interacting with the citizens of New York.

The words "sermon" has evolved in meaning over time: from "conversation" to "discourse", described as a lengthy speech delivered with great passion. Early sermons were delivered in the form of question and answer, and not only later did it come to mean a monologue. Futurefarmers commissioned poet Bernadette Mayer, writer/activist Rebecca Solnit, filmmaker/writer Astra Taylor and fiction writer, Cooley Windsor to create a series of contemporary and relevant "Sermons" which was read and delivered at the Church of the Ascension in Greenwich Village, Manhattan and at the Guggenheim Museum, New York.

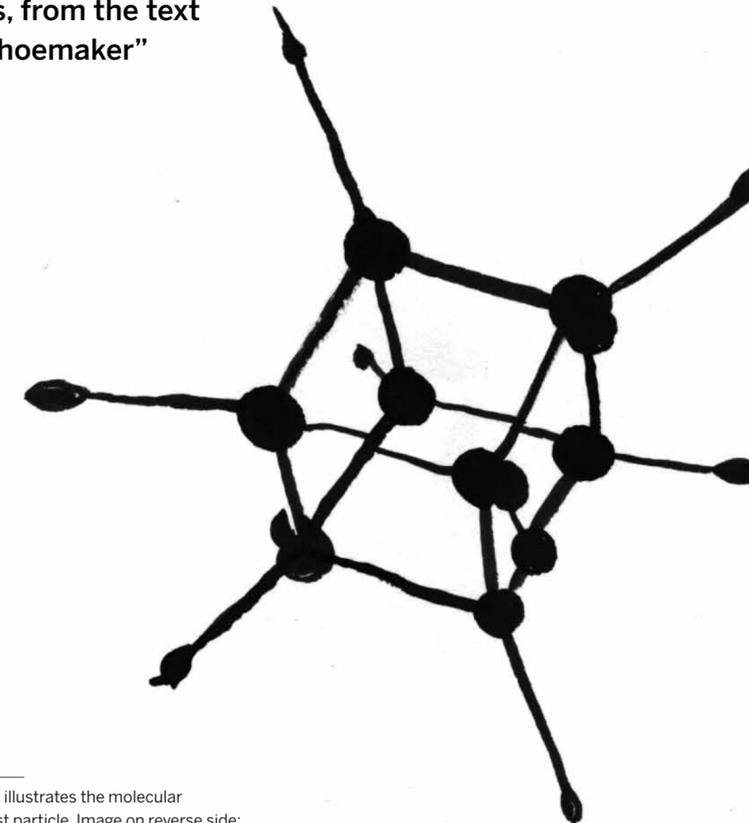
Simon embodied the Cynic ideals of free speech and autonomy. –John Sellars, from the text "Simon the shoemaker"

In the next days, taking from the concept of Simon as a living example of a form of knowledge analogous to the what Socrates was searching for (namely the art of taking care of one's soul), Futurefarmers ignited intimate public dialogs with: 1. A labor historian providing context to the working transition of skilled craftsmen of custom-made boots to mass production and the value of productive labor in contemporary America (Bruce Laurie, Emeritus Professor, University of Massachusetts, Amherst) 2. A geographer, who passionately discusses the environmental prejudice embedded in social labor relations and the reclamation of nature and society, while speaking to a group of thinkers at the Gowanus Canal in Brooklyn (Neil Smith Distinguished Professor, Anthropology, City University of New York Graduate Center) 3. An unconventional academe known for his provocative ethnographic studies discussing the foot, the shoe, philosophy and fetishes, from Freud, to Karl Marx and in being cool, held at the Spectacle Theater in Brooklyn (Michael Taussig Professor of Anthropology, Columbia University, New York).

Fact: Early sermons were delivered in the form of question and answer, and that only later did it come to mean a monologue.

In between and after these discussions, the Futurefarmers instigated ink gathering excursions in different parts of New York with an urban ecologist (Gillian Stewart/ Queens College), and environmental specialists (Thomas Matte/Hunters College, David Wheeler/ New York State Department) walking, gathering and talking about the Urban Ecology in NYC as well as the citizens lifestyle choices that affect the city's environment as well as their own health. The "soot" collected from the ink gathering excursions were mixed with honey and eggs harvested from New York City rooftop hives and gardens to form ink used to print the Soul/Sole Sermons with a public print-making intervention entitled, the Pedestrian Press.

to live the life of an autonomous artisan — the life of a shoemaker... –John Sellars, from the text "Simon the shoemaker"



The drawing to the right illustrates the molecular structure of a single dust particle. Image on reverse side: As part of the exhibition at the Guggenheim, Futurefarmers intalled a cobbler's bench, as an extension of the existing design by Frank Lloyd Wright.

A TO Z INTRODUCTORY NOTES

by the futurefarmers

Archaeology. What are we digging for? **B**arefoot. Socrates enters a cobbler's shop where youth would gather in a type of school; a sole thinkery. Did Socrates come to the cobbler for shoes? It is said that he was searching for something that he could not find within the Athenian Agora. The cobbler had a different knowledge that was based in materials and their relationship to humans through their hands. Socrates on the other hand, is known for his immaterial ways; he did not write things down, he did not wear shoes and was a man of minimal means. We imagine the 33 Dialogues, that might have taken place between Simon and Socrates, were feverishly written down by Simon after Socrates left his shop, but if they do not exist physically, then where did they go? We could imagine that Socrates burned Simon's notes out of stubbornness or maybe the Shoemaker's Dialogues were used as kindling for a flame to warm the philosophers feet. **C**obbler. Socrates enjoyed the company of Simon the Shoemaker because, as a craftsperson, he was one of the few individuals that Socrates could find who possessed a form of secure knowledge and expertise, namely the art of taking care of one's sole. **D**ust. **E**. **F**oot. The original unit of measure is believed to be based on the length of a man's foot. In rural regions and without calibrated rulers, many units of measurement were based on the length of some part of the body of the person measuring. To prevent discord and enable trade, many towns decided on a standard length and displayed this publicly. It is said that in some towns the standard was redefined with each new ruler based on his foot size, thus demanding a total recalibration of their former standards. **G**ravity. We use the word *soot* to describe settled particulate matter: dust, pollen, skin, meteorite particles, salt from sea spray, tiny particles of rubber from tires, unburnt fuel from our vehicles and the decomposition of organic matter. Soot is the visible manifestation of an ecology of natural and human-made bits. The gravitational pull of the Earth brings this complex of ingredients down to the ground where it settles, becoming evidence of our collaboration with nature, evidence of the fallout of production, evidence of life and its inevitable decomposition into dust. **H**istory. Ancient sources refer to a Simon as an associate of Socrates, but the fact that neither Plato nor Xenophon mention Simon has often been cited as an argument against his very existence. The situation has somewhat changed since the discovery of the remains of a shop near the Tholos on the south-west edge of the Agora, the floor scattered with hob-nails, containing a base from a pot with 'Simon' inscribed upon it. Archaeologists commenting upon this discovery have been keen to identify its owner with the Simon mentioned in the literary sources as a companion of Socrates: but scholars primarily concerned with ancient philosophy have tended to remain doubtful. Simon's reputation relies principally upon the claim made by Diogenes Laertius that he was the first to write 'Socratic dialogues' or later referred to as *Shoemaker's Dialogues*. **I**nk The color that absorbs the light on this page is ink made from the dust under our feet, or sole. We have collected an inventory of soot from in front of shoe repair stores in the five boroughs of NYC. Ancient shoemakers used a pigment to make shoes black called atramentum, and similar ink was used for writing. Today the material that makes our shoes black or our ink black is a mineral that we dig from far below the earth's surface. **J**ar. Five glass jars of *soot ink* sat in a vitrine in the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum between May 4 and 14th in 2011. **K**. **L**bs is an abbreviation for the unit of mass we call *pounds*. How much does your soul weigh? How much does your sole weigh? **M**ining. Humans have been digging in the earth from the time we began walking on two feet, having our hands free. We dig down to build up. The material that makes skyscrapers was once far below our feet, hidden, underground. The spiral shaped Guggenheim building emerges materially from the ground – a monument to a long history of digging – changing what is below us to what is above us. **N**. **O**, A partial list of the alleged 33 dialogues between Simon and Socrates; *On the Good, What is the Beautiful, On the Just, On Virtue*, that it cannot be taught, *On Courage; I, 11, and III, On Poetry, On Good Passions, On Knowledge, On Teaching, On the Art of Conversation, On Judging, On Being, On Number, On Care, On Work, On Greed, On Pretentiousness, On Doing III...* **P**edestrian Press. A set of 36 shoes each with a rubber letter and stamp pad attached to the bottom. The entire set forms a type family. A roll of paper is rolled out on the streets of New York City. A group of pedestrians wearing the shoes compose and print the Soul/Sermons using soot ink. **Q**. **R**. **S**oul/Sole Sermons. The word "sermon" derives from the Latin words *sermo*, meaning *discourse* and *serere*, which means to *join together or conversation*, which could mean that early sermons were delivered in the form of question and answer, and not a monologue.

Futurefarmers invited poet, Bernadette Mayer, essayist, Rebecca Solnit, and short fiction writer, Cooley Windsor to consider the floating space between one's "sole" and "soul" in the form of a "sermon". Each writer was given a paper written by John Sellars about the supposed relationship of Socrates and Simon. **T**hing. When the act of making and thinking come together – an intersection of the material and immaterial emerges. In the case of the shoe, the opportunity arises to question the material object, "the sole" and the more subjective "soul" that it carries above or with it. Looking at a shoe from several perspectives will hopefully give light to the hidden power of common objects. If we imagine the long thread that stretches back to Socrates having a series of dialogs in a cobbler's studio, "things" and makers of "things" have a long history and role in society. As artists who make "things" we are interested in this place/footing. We are not interested in putting the craftsperson on a romantic pedestal but the conversation that happened between Simon and Socrates resonates with us and maybe we in some way have both in all of us. **U**. As you read this text remember that it was collected from the ground you walk upon – your footprints and my footprints may have rubbed off on the street and could be in this ink that is in the letter "U" in the word soul or the "L" in the word sole. **V**. Frank Lloyd **W**right. Futurefarmers extends a curved wooden bench, that Frank Lloyd Wright designed inside the Solomon R. Guggenheim museum, into a cobbler's bench. Extending the architecture and the function, the bench becomes an entry point into the re-imagined cobbler's shop of Simon. **X**. **Y**ou and me. Our soles rub on the streets and we leave a part of our self behind. **Z**

SHOEMAKER'S DIALOGUES

2

A dialog with labor historian, Bruce Laurie at the General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen of the City of New York.



Labor historian and professor Bruce Laurie chose the building of the General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen of the City of New York as the meeting point for the dialog. This was something intended as a symbolic reference to the legacy of American artisans. Apart from their working conditions, these artisans were concerned that their work production will consume their minds and that the life of the mind will suffer. With the motto: By hammer and hand all arts do stand, the history of the place loaded with the idea of "Thinking and Doing".

By hammer and hand, all arts do stand – motto of the General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen, NYC

In Ancient Greece, "Agora" was off limits to young boys, and the place of gathering was at Simon's shoe shop, where he would often have discussions with Socrates. Simon and Socrates was a representation of an intellectual and social independence built on craft knowledge (they would not never succumb to become servants of power), and therefore combined the "thinking and doing".

They were concerned that making things will consume their minds and the life of the mind will suffer.
– Bruce Laurie

Bruce Laurie's detailed account of the radical history of shoe shops located in the periphery of NYC, where public property and the street co-existed amongst "shop talks," book readings, one political meeting to the next, and the birth of home grown American radicalism (ie. William Heighon, shoemaker and founder of the American Labor Movement), provided context to the working transition of skilled craftsmen. These discussions gave the audience a glimpse of the history of custom-made boots to mass production and the value of productive labor in modern America.

They were creating a labor movement that question not only work, but intellectual uplift. They wanted Libraries, reading rooms, debating societies to counter ignorance. – Bruce Laurie

During the late 19th century, when rapid industrialization was at blinding speed, these American tradesmen (who questioned both their work and intellectual uplift), were the "Simon" in the Socratic story, and their eloquence and feisty legacy to an artisan past combined the "Thinking and doing" which strongly represented concrete knowledge and admirable personal independence.

Notes: Bruce Laurie is an Emeritus Professor, at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

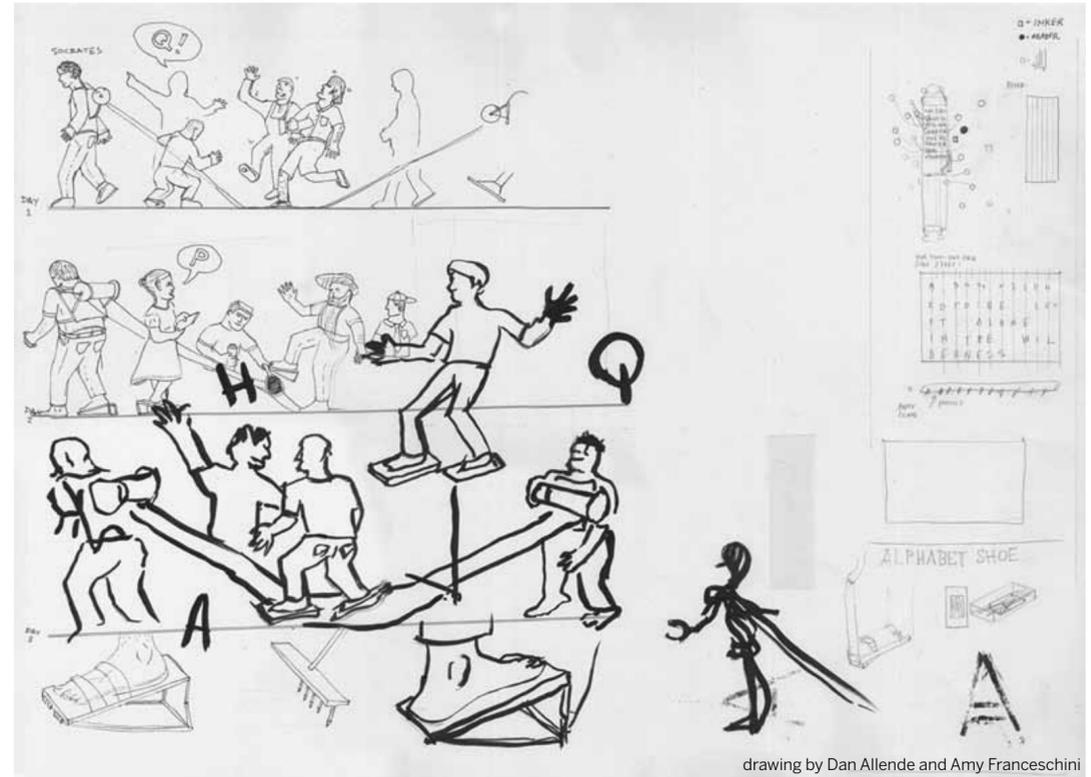
On the reverse side of this page are the A to Z introductory notes originally published by Futurefarmers for the H. Solomon Guggenheim museum in April of 2011.



SHOEMAKER'S DIALOGUES

3

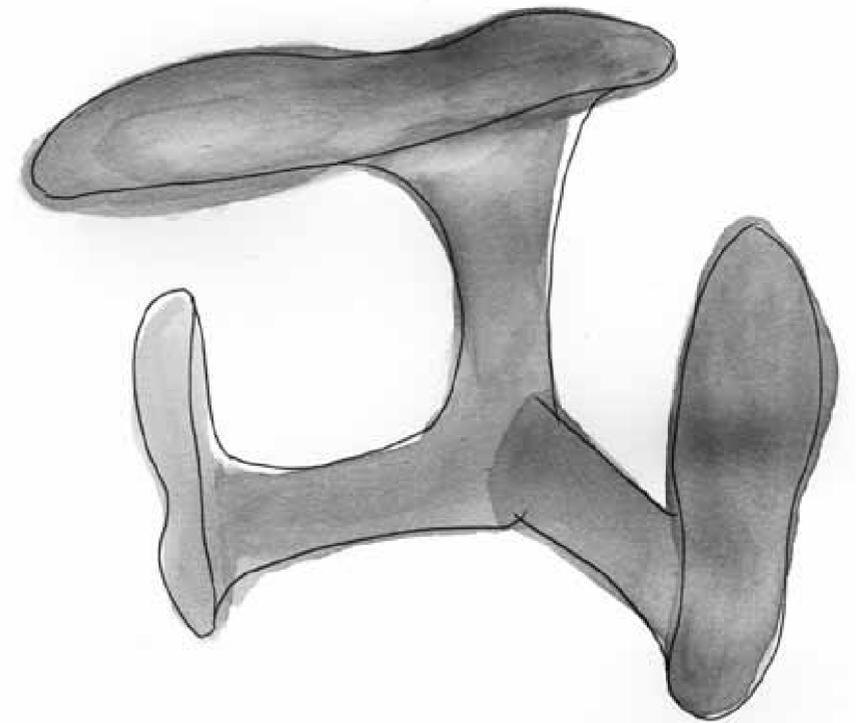
The Pedestrian Press; soot ink, walking and printing.



The Pedestrian Press is a DIY print-making medium which was created for the public to assist/participate in printing a series of texts about the relationship between the sole and the soul with thirty-six specialized printing shoes.

Futurefarmers made ink from particulate matter collected in front of shoemakers and shoe repair stores across New York City. The "soot" was mixed with egg and honey to make ink. This ink was used to print the text of the Soul/Sole Sermons and the public dialogues through a series of participatory urban actions comprised of several sets of shoes that make up an entire character set. A roll of paper was rolled out onto the streets of the city and group of pedestrians wearing the shoes composed and printed Soul/Sole Sermons using soot ink.

It could be that I am a fish or was one once I remember thinking Aristotle was an asshole.
— Bernadette Mayer, from the Soul Sermon, "Integrative Paleontology"





SHOEMAKER'S DIALOGUES

4

A short tour of the Gowanus Canal
with Neil Smith.



Neil Smith, social theorist/geography and urban anthropology expert meets a group of thinkers at the Gowanus Canal in Brooklyn. He speaks strongly about the idea of how social thought has been caught up in the entanglement and current separation between the social and the natural. Passionately discussing the environmental prejudice embedded in social labor and critically considering discussions on the reclamation of nature and society.

Almost all of the environmental movement and its latest incarnations since from the 60's and 70s was all about putting nature and society back together again... How can we have been so stupid to assume it's separation? – Neil Smith

The Gowanus Canal is a U.S. "Superfund" site, meaning, it is part of a federal government program to address abandoned hazardous waste sites. The group walked around the entire area and even towards the canal's edge to discuss the history of the location,

remnants and other indication of the co-existence of the natural environment and social labor. Our eyes don't tell us the truth sometimes – For instance, the park, conservation and the development of a wholefoods site is an idea and visually present to buffer the rubble of the post-industrial marks or other investments that went into the area, and the other social production in the place that our eyes don't see by seeing the bare land. In this condition, nature is used as an alternative to industrial society and separate of society, to heal the bad stuff.. and it doesn't work that way unfortunately.

Human labor is simultaneously social and natural at the same time. – Neil Smith

The point to the Gowanus Canal is not the argument about the necessity of cleaning up old facilities that are to a greater extent, toxic. The point to Neil Smith is that it does not make sense to look at this area and still make a distinction between nature and society. As a human society, we are intrinsically part of the production in the natural world (and distinction only causes separation). The question is: How do we produce a natural world, and under what conditions? There must



be social democracy emphasized over the production of the natural world, much as the production the social world. Neil Smith puts this in the forefront, he asks us to think about this fact – that the democracy of the natural world vs. the democracy of the production of the social world is actually part of the same question.

Imagine yourself as transparent as glass,
and everything that is inside you can be seen
by the environment that you are in. You do
not need to offer words or thoughts or
change anything, just imagine that everything
that is inside you can be seen by whatever
is outside of you. This is an offering, and what
is being offered is your soul.

At the Spectacle Theater in Brooklyn, an intimate gathering surrounds the main speaker, Michael Taussig, an unconventional academe known for his provocative studies on ethnography (Columbia University, New York/ European Graduate School, Switzerland). Discussing the foot, the shoe, philosophy and fetishes, from Freud, to Karl Marx and in being cool. Taussig talks about the way of the shoe and how it fits into the whole science and understanding of economy from ancient Greece to Marx's analysis of profit and exchange value in capitalism, Heidegger's analysis of Van Gogh's boots and Warhol's diamond dust shoes.

**What is about bare feet that drives men mad?
Surely a bare foot is no more unhygienic than a shoe?
Perhaps the problem lies less with the foot than with philosophy... and the many fetishes brought to our attention by the likes of Freud, Marx and being cool.**
—Michael Taussig

A step is an infinitely delicate, complex operation.
—Rebecca Solnit, from the soul sermon, "The Road Made by Walking"

Further extremes (signaling fetish) can be taken from the shoe. For instance, it can be a thrilling, sexual or economic... it can also be a mix of attraction and distaste like a dialectic mix of desire and fear. He then compares quilts to sandals, the domestic mode of production and gift economy as opposed to market economy, and tells stories of peasant farmers working with their bare feet and hand.

The dynamic architecture of the fetishes combines revelation and concealment in being barefoot and wearing shoes, seemingly a metaphor for seeing or not seeing. Expanding the dialog and revealing possible traces and histories which can be taken from shoes, and the way shoes may or may not have shape our culture.



HOW TO COLLECT SOOT

You just need a brush and a glass vial. Brush dust into vial. It takes some time. But you do not need a whole lot. You can also take a brush to the streets and have a sort of dust pan and it is ok if there is dirt in the dust. Take note of the exact location. If there are any shoemakers left in Berlin it is nice to go to their store and collect there or any other sort of craftsman.



BRONX



MANHATTAN



BROOKLYN



STATEN IS.

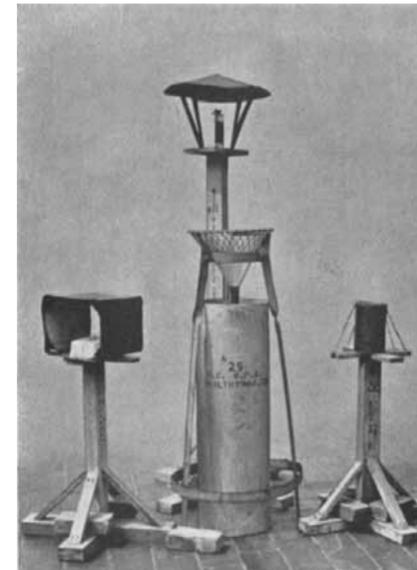


QUEENS

SHOEMAKER'S DIALOGUES

6

Ink collecting with Gillian Stewart, Environmental Scientist.



The Image above: Soot collecting while waiting for the A train.

The historical image on the left are examples of the simple equipment used to collecting dust and soot. These were distributed throughout New York city in the late 1930s. Image: from "Soot", Heating and Ventilation Magazine, June 1937, (39)

note: Gillian Stewart is an Associate Professor of Environmental Science at Queens College, City University of New York

More than 40 acres of land disappears from under our feet each year in the 26,000 acre, Gateway National Recreation Area. Home to over 500 species of plant and wildlife, this urban estuary reflects the resilience of nature in New York City.

The dialog with Gillian Stewart was geared towards her research on the dust that settles on the surface water of the periphery of NYC. The particles that gather here tells about the consumption patterns and particulate matter coming from within the city, but also from around the world.

The most wonderful aspect of traveling on the A Train from within the center of Manhattan to the periphery is the change in ethnic diversity from stop to stop and the energy and sound that accompaies this transition.
— Amy Franceschini, Futurefarmers

Futurefarmers took participants on the A Train to Gillian Stewart's 2007 research site where they walked barefoot upon what remains the most ecologically diverse landscape in NYC. At once, the heat of the sand unveiled their frailty as shoe wearing, cement stomping beings.

Ink Gathering in NYC causes paranoia and curiosity in the onlooker. The gathering of particulate matter on the surface becomes a physical articulation of the invisible patterns of consumption... evidence that has no laws against its collection (yet).
— Amy Franceschini, Futurefarmers

Upon this swath of land, they discussed Gillian's research of the surrounding bodies of water and the role of atmospheric dust (soot) in sequestering carbon dioxide from the atmosphere into the deep ocean.



Futurefarmers went to Harlem and collected "soot" in each burrough directly where the "Soul Kitchen" used to be; a shop run by a well-known local shoemaker.

The pedestrian press was performed in front of its former location with soot ink collected from the site. Passersby ranged from excited youth on their way home from school to long time residents who recalled the shoemaker and re-told stories of the shoes he had made for men and women. According to neighborhood lore, his claim to fame was for making a size 22 shoe for basketball player Shaquille O'Neal.

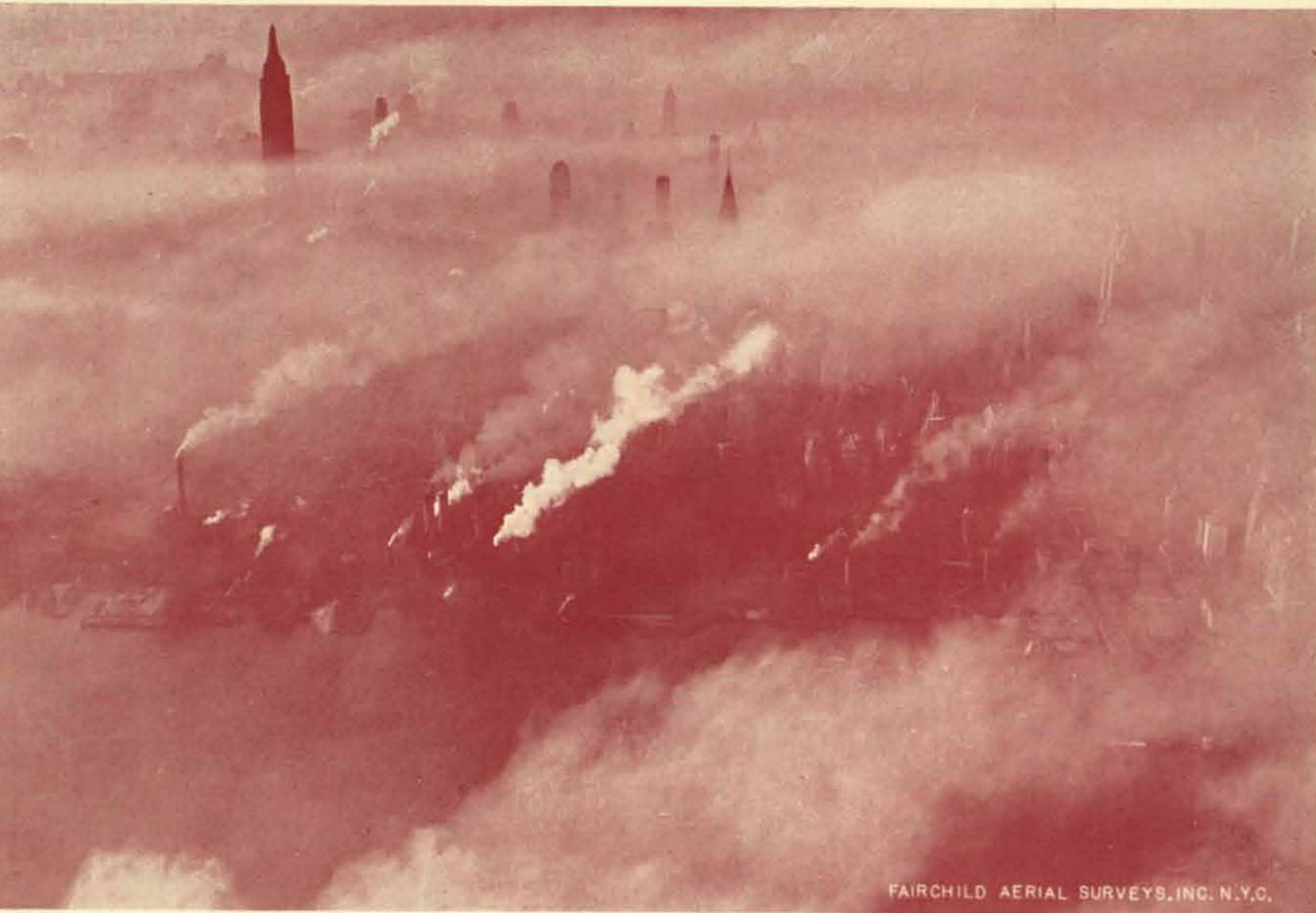
In the performances on the street, Futurefarmers were open to their chance encounters with people on the street, as Amy Franceschini of Futurefarmers notes: "The children began to wrap and stomp the wooden shoes in a rhythm to accompany their mouth beats and lyrics."

When collecting soot in Brooklyn, I stepped into "Magic Joe's Shoe Repair" and saw a new version of how a shoe repair store needs to diversify. As you walk into the shoe repair store on the left, inside the store, is a one inch thick bullet proof enclosure for a lottery ticket dispensing station. After I talked to the owner I went out side and collected soot in front of the building.

**— Michael Swaine,
Futurefarmers**

AIR POLLUTION

A Study of Air Pollution in New York City



FAIRCHILD AERIAL SURVEYS, INC. N.Y.C.

Air pollution is a subject of prime importance to heating and air conditioning engineers for two good reasons: first, fuel burning heating equipment is responsible for at least a portion of the undesirable substances which clutter up the air in urban districts; second, because air conditioning is probably necessary to remove these and other perhaps still more undesirable substances from the air in order to make the air fit to breathe. It is noteworthy that we are all concerned about the quality of the 5 1/2 lb. of food and water we consume daily but little attention is given to the 25 lb. of air we breathe during the same period.

The exhibits shown on the following seven pages are from a survey made in New York City under the city's health department, using WPA men and money. Results of this survey were reported in "A Study of Air Pollution in New York City" by Sol Pincus and A. C. Stern presented in a paper before the public health engineering section of the American Public Health Association at its annual meeting last fall, and published in the Association's American Journal of Public Health.

SHOEMAKER'S DIALOGUES

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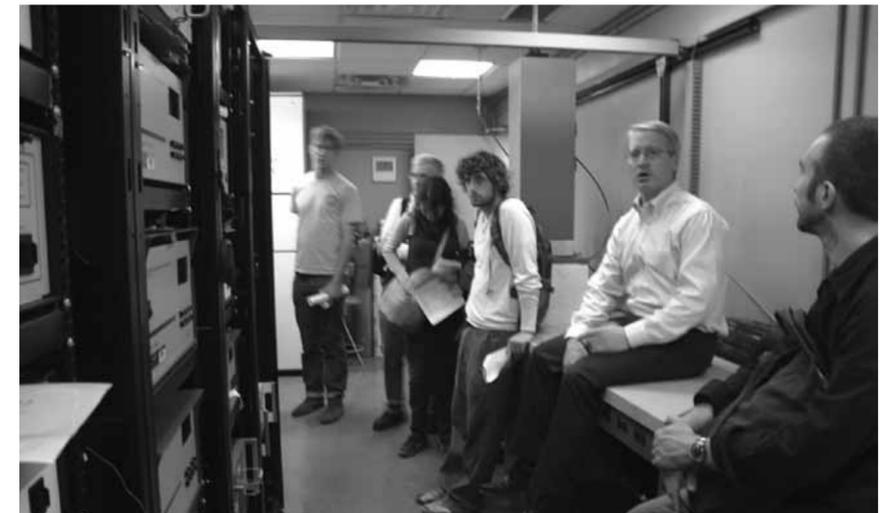
A walk with Thomas Matte + David Wheeler.

"A large portion of NY apartments heat themselves using residual oil (aka No. 2 oil). A black smoke emits from smoke stacks and coats Manhattan with a dark particulate matter. Interestingly, many of these remaining oil heated apartments are in the upper west side (one of the highest economic brackets) and the effects of their smoke are felt on the periphery of new York City where there are high rates of asthma, cardiovascular disease and over 150 related deaths per year. It is said that the amount these apartments spend on fresh flowers in their hallways costs more than it would to replace their heating systems with cleaner systems."

— Amy Franceschini, Futurefarmers

Day 8 was spent in discussion with Dr. Thomas Matte (New York City Community Air Survey) and David Wheeler (Dept. of Environmental Conservation NYC). A nice walk took Futurefarmers through busy urban canyons, quieter side streets and a park. Observations and discussions surrounding air pollution and our health was talked about. And so it seems, lifestyle choices, routes and our own personal chosen modes of living affect our city's environment and our own health, and this was further investigated by the group and the professionals with much interest.

The amount spent on freshflowers in the hallways of upper east side apartments in one year costs more than it would to replace an entire antiquated heating system.
—Institute for Policy Integrity.



top image: A participant shows a sample of the visible particle matter brought on by air pollution.

bottom image: This is the interior of the New York State, NYC Air Quality Monitoring Station. The new model of the 1935 version was replicated by the Futurefarmers on the roof of the Guggenheim. It collects particulate matter and sends it to upstate NY to be analyzed and uses this data to shape policy around emissions control and industry.



Inspiration and resource material: on the reverse side of this page is a 1937 article from "Heating & Ventilating" magazine on air pollution, which was used as some of the reference material for the project.



On the final day of the program, the Pedestrian Press was taken outside and in front of the Guggenheim Museum on the upper east side of New York City. Futurefarmers and the participants took a tour round the blocks near the museum wearing the pedestrian press shoes to take the intervention outside.

Generating curiosity from the passers by, the group was often stopped and asked questions (some offers were even made by pedestrians to purchase a pair of shoes). In the four-hour period of printing done outside of the museum, the artisan-group had become a well-coordinated DIY printing brigade, transcribing the "thinking and doing", inspired from their participation from the travelling, talking and gathering 9-day urban "thinkery".

On the reverse side of this page is an image of two members of the Futurefarmers collective wearing the portable paper roll dispensers they used to take the Pedestrian Press into the streets.

In collaboration with Futurefarmers, this set of Newsletters has been printed for the exhibition "Unfolding: Process" at the Grimmuseum, Berlin, May 27- June 11, 2011. Curated by Jerlyn Jareunpoon and Lian Ladia.

