

New Survivalism – Alternative Bug-Out-Bags Parsons & Charlesworth

Press Release

Summary

Parsons & Charlesworth present a new body of work entitled New Survivalism - a speculative design approach to survivalism that asks “what alternative scenarios of survival are there that avoid the bunker mentality and respond to currently emerging research into technological change, environmental conditions and belief systems?”

Commissioned by the Istanbul Foundation For Culture and the Arts(IKSV) for the 2nd Istanbul Design Biennial and curated by Zoë Ryan and associate curator Meredith Carruthers, the biennial entitled “The Future Is Not What It Used To Be”, hosts 53 projects that ask: “What is the future now?” By rethinking the manifesto as a platform to frame pertinent questions, the projects question the role of design, its relationship to society, and its ability to be an active agent for change.

Exhibited as a range of six mini-manifestos, New Survivalism uses designed objects and storytelling to explore the survival strategies of a disparate set of protagonists, each with a very different take on what they “need”. The projects consist of six fictional protagonists and their six alternative survival kits alongside six story texts. Each one contains a mixture of found and designed objects that suggest what each protagonist would have in their kit.

To accompany the bug-out bags, New Survivalism includes a tool for assessing what might be valuable to us in the not-too-distant future. A choose-your-own-adventure-style questionnaire, (designed with [Christopher Roeleveld](#)) this adaptive manifesto guides us to reflect on who we are as individuals and what a crisis might mean for our interests.

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2nd Istanbul Design Biennial
The Future Is Nto What It Used To Be
1 November - 14 December

Biennial Hub
Galata Greek Primary School
Kemeralti Cad. 49, Karakoy

Tuesday – Sunday 10am-7pm
Thursday 10am – 8pm

<http://2tb.iksv.org/index.asp>

Summary from ‘The Future Is Not What It Used To Be’ Exhibition Catalog

New Survivalism emerged from Jessica Charlesworth and Tim Parsons's research into the common practice of preparing a portable kit for short-term evacuation after a disaster. Often referred to as "bug-out bags," they usually contain basic survival equipment such as first aid supplies, food, clothing to protect the wearer from the elements, balls of twine, and Swiss army knives. The alternative bags conceived by Parsons & Charlesworth go beyond the bare necessities, taking into account desirable and interesting exit strategies and emotional and physical needs in emergencies, and imagining building blocks for a new society.

"Recent social and political upheaval in capitalist societies provides new opportunities to re-imagine and dream," commented Charlesworth and Parsons. The bug-out bags they have designed respond to this kind of near future, in which changes in technology, social behavior, and the natural environment unfold quickly. Each bag reflects a different individual's response to their personal needs in an imagined future and how they packed to meet it. Packing impels us to prioritize and make selections. For Charlesworth and Parsons, "every bug-out bag is a prediction of the future and can be created as a manifesto for what you want to happen." In this way, the bag "is like a time capsule that contains things that you value at that moment or [believe] would be transformative in the event of disaster." What might be essential for the fields of energy, theology, synthetic biology, terraforming (colonizing other planets), and governance? What future will you choose?

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Project Description

New Survivalism – Alternative Bug-Out-Bags A Speculative Design Project by Parsons & Charlesworth

“We see that the world is entering an age of ecological collapse, material contraction and social and political unraveling... We don't believe that responses to this global reality can be confined, as they currently are, to the political, scientific or technological: they need to be cultural too.”

The Dark Mountain Project <http://dark-mountain.net/about/faqs/>

Since the threat of nuclear cataclysm in the mid twentieth century “survivalism” has embedded itself in the public consciousness as an attitude and a body of knowledge for those intent on planning for the worst-case scenario. Typically survivalists pursue extreme self-sufficiency, squirreling food, medical supplies and weapons, undertaking related training and identifying safe havens. The focus is on reverting to tried and tested means, and as such, it is anything but progressive.

This project takes a speculative approach to survivalism and asks “what alternative scenarios of survival are there that avoid the bunker mentality and respond to currently emerging research into technological change, environmental conditions and belief systems?” The project uses designed objects and storytelling to explore the survival strategies of a disparate set of protagonists, each with a very different take on what they “need”.

Conventional survival kits address only the bottom of Abraham Maslow's famous Hierarchy of Needs (the physiological and safety needs of food, water, shelter etc.). Rather than replacing such kits, the alternatives proposed here represent the higher concerns of our protagonists; the protection of culture, the ability to make good decisions, the facility to plan and dream, the provision of access to cheap power, among other things.

As thought experiments intended to broaden debate about how we approach the concept of post-disaster scenarios in our culture, these alternative survival kits are intended as a starting point for you to engage with the question “what would be in my survival kit.”



The Object Guardian

Ok that's it - No more dawdling I need to finish this. Most of the time I am in the lab fighting the acidity of paper, the copper corrosion of miniatures, the chemical burning of leather, the shrinkage of overheated parchment. Pondering how these eight million artifacts came to be here. Trying to memorize just some of them seemed ridiculous but what if I am the only one left to remember? Sure, they've got their Integrated Emergency Management plan all tied up but who is the real guardian? Who is taking the memories of these artifacts to the people, when the people can no longer come to them?

Feynman said to understand something you have to make it. This may not be much but it's as close as I can get. As I revolve it in my hands I imagine wandering through the Alexander room, up a floor, past the gaggle of kids with the mummies, into the depths of the museum to the Renaissance splendor of the Waddesdon bequest. Neil's book, A history of the world in 100 Objects had been the inspiration but the reality of finding or making each replica to an appropriate scale was expensive and time consuming, and time was not on my side.



The Decision Maker

Never make your most important decisions when you are at your most vulnerable they say. Wait. Be patient. The storm will pass they say. But what if the storm never passes? What if I find myself in the storm indefinitely?

How am I supposed to make decisions, be self-reliant and prepared if I don't know what is going to happen next? And I have no idea what is going to happen next. They say it might happen, the coming turmoil. What am I supposed to do? What is the best thing to do? What are other people doing? And do they know any better than I do? What makes common sense? And who defines common sense in a crisis anyway? Do I pray for a miracle or set up a committee? Where should I go? Inside? Underground? Away from here? How do I know what to take with me? "Just in case" provides too many options.

The kit, the kit, the kit. I need the kit. Roll the dice, shuffle the cards, ask the I-Ching. Breathe. So many tools...but which one to use?



The Re-wilder

The lactose intolerance was a convenient start. Amazing really. Anatomically modern humans have only drunk milk in adulthood since we've been farmers. Our genes somehow adjusted to the prevalence of dairy products. But I'm going back further than that. It's the only way. To return to the to the hunter-gatherer lifestyle. "Lifestyle". Pah! It's not a lifestyle. It's nature. It's how life's meant to be lived. We've just been led astray.

I'm turning technology against itself. Using it to wean myself off. Going feral. Healing my 10,000-year-old wounds. When there's no one left to trust but yourself you have to work on the basis of immediate-returns. Not shackled up in a bunker with a year's supply of beans. Not like those part-timers. The paleo-dieters, weekend-survivalists, armchair-primitivists. This is no hobby. The IGF-1 gene therapy proved that. \$30,000 and eighteen months of injections so far, but it's working. I used to bench just over my own body weight. Now I'm up to twice that. The olfaction and follicular therapies are progressing and I'm about a year away from independence. This is my survival kit and when the time comes, I leave here empty-handed but fully prepared.



The Biophotovoltaics Hactivist

The tub of stabilizing peptides finally showed up last week – the last ingredient completing MIT scientist Andreas Mershin's vision that one day making your own solar cells will be as easy as baking a cake. Not a particularly simple cake mind you!

The Photosystem I protein was a bit of a hassle to extract from the grass clippings. Pulverizing them, straining through cheesecloth, adding detergent, whirling them around in the centrifuge. Then the zinc sheet for the anode had to be bathed in chemicals to grow a nanowire forest on its surface to absorb enough light when the PS-I was soaked into it. And the whole tasty sandwich had to be topped off with electrolyte and a layer of conductive plastic film before hooking it up. But it was all possible. Without a lab. And without electricity.

The case was the first thing I made. The way things were going I didn't know how long I could stay, so getting out fast with all this gear was a must. I've got enough chemicals here to power a village. And when the grid shuts off, I have a feeling I'll be in demand.



The Futurist Storyteller

As an eight year old, I would often set out my action figures and building blocks in a line and begin to forge new alliances and build indestructible hideouts, creating superhuman strengths from the animal spirit of their choosing. I was in control of a fictional land, making my own rules and making tangible what I did not understand around me.

One day, heaven forbid, you might find yourself reluctantly alive in a derelict place. You may no longer know who your leaders are or what the future holds. In preparation for that desperate prospect my parting wish is for you to have in your possession, this. I call it my Case for Hypothetical Worlds.

It is filled with miscellaneous objects attempting to taxonomize existing entities, concepts and phenomena. There are maps, pens, modeling clay and no rules. It's a thinking tool to hypothesize genuine futures and fantastical stories in a time when clear thinking may prove difficult and the morale of a good yarn may be hard to come by. Consider it an insurance policy for your dreams.



The SETI Reserves Member

Congratulations Reserves Member! In the boundless electromagnetic Search for Extra-Terrestrial Intelligence, we thank you for your support and participation in our most ambitious project to date. Since its inception SETI League members have been instrumental in conducting a thorough sky survey and developing technologies to assist fellow members in assembling radio or optical observatories.

Today the SETI League is convening a new generation of citizen scientists to secure, through uncertain times, our quest to search for cosmic companions. We have enjoyed long and fruitful collaborations with the institutions operating the world's largest telescopes including Green Bank and the Allen Telescope Array. However, events beyond our control are likely to restrict our access to this equipment in the future.

The SETI League Reserves Emergency Parabolic Instrument Collaborative (EPIC) Array Project provides Reserves members access to portable radio telescopic equipment to be deployed en-mass at a pre-defined location in the Mojave Desert in the event of a major cataclysm. We have generated a set of protocols for Reserves members to follow that will enable the creation of the largest independently operated antennae in history. The array effectively acts as a single antenna and its size will determine the effectiveness of our search. We appreciate your help in recruiting new members and we thank you for your commitment to our continued quest.

Bio

About Parsons & Charlesworth

Tim Parsons and Jessica Charlesworth are a Chicago-based British husband and wife team working in the realm of experimental and speculative object making. Their work is wide-ranging, from material experimentation and adapting meaningful found objects, to speculative and narrative-led work. They moved to Chicago in 2010 for Parsons to take up his current position of Associate Professor in Designed Objects at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC).

Parsons and Charlesworth are both graduates of the Royal College of Art in London, Charlesworth from the Design Interactions course (graduating 2007) and Parsons from Design Products (graduating 2000).

As a designer, Parsons has worked with manufacturers in Britain and Europe and exhibited widely, including at The Design Museum, London and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago. He has contributed articles and essays to publications including Blueprint, ICON, Crafts and Phaidon's Design Classics and his book Thinking:Objects: Contemporary Approaches to Product Design was published in 2009 by AVA Academia.

Since graduating from the RCA Charlesworth has run her own practice often collaborating with scientists, artists, futurists and academics including think tanks Foresight (UK) and the Institute for the Future (US). She has exhibited at the MAKVienna, the Ace Museum in Los Angeles, the Chicago Cultural Center and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago.

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