

Alternative Protocols

J Ryan Westphal

MFA Transdisciplinary Design; Parsons; The New School

New York City, NY, USA

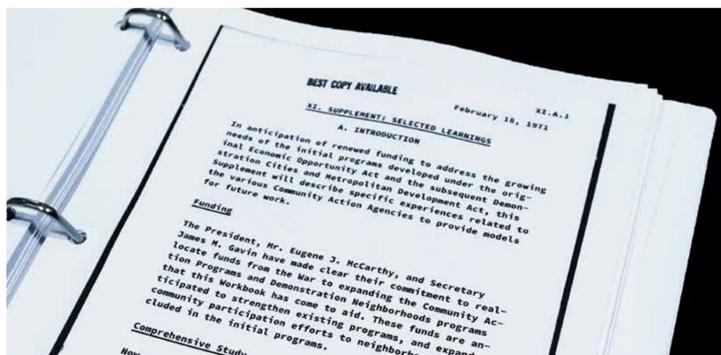
jryanwestphal@newschool.edu



Scenes from an alternative history.

In March, I assumed the role of intern with the long-defunct federal Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO), once an important part of the United States' War on Poverty. For nearly two decades the OEO, a branch of the Executive Office of the President of the United States, was responsible for implementing policy enacted by the 1964 Economic Opportunity Act. However, following years of underfunding and shifting political ideologies, the OEO was never able to fully realize its original charge - enforcing the requirement that communities impacted by policy decisions are ensured "maximum feasible participation" in making those decisions.

My first task in assuming an internship with this Office has been to build a counterfactual history. Through a process of researching and documenting this history in a Community Action Wiki, an alternative world has emerged. From this world, alternative participatory protocols have been generated and shared. These Alternative Protocols are further explored by taking form as supplements to the 1964 Community Action Workbook and as experiential games.



Supplements to the 1964 Community Action Workbook.



Formicarium; an experience of Alternative Protocols.



Visit communityaction.wiki for more information.

The Community Action Wiki serves as a platform for worldbuilding; searching, editing, and adding-to this wiki is the primary process for constructing Alternative Protocols.

These protocols serve as design speculations, asking what our participatory practices might-have-been had the OEO been allowed to continue advocating for "maximum feasible participation". But, at the same time, Alternative Protocols are also fully realized participatory engagements, suitable for implementation in real-world contexts. In this way, they hope to operationalize speculation, and bridge the gap between our current situations and possible futures.

This work is continuing to build on alternative histories and open them up to collective imagining. In so doing, it hopes to contribute to ongoing conversations about how participatory design might collectively imagine worlds and bring them into being.