FIELD STATION: ARCHITECTURE IN THE EXPANDED FIELD

Architecture Master Studio 2016
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Field Sation Berlin, photograph & arial photgraph, 2016

FIELD STATION BERLIN

Teufelsberg, an artificial hill constructed from the rubble of Berlin after the second world war, on the site of the Nazi military-technical school designed by Albert Speer. The hill is the highest point in Berlin and surrounding, the American and British forces constructed a spy station on this strategic location. The station was operated by the NSA during the cold war from 1961 till 1992. Its large installations and radar domes were operated 24h a day, spying on military and radio communication from East Berlin, Russia and the nations within the Warsaw pact.

After the reunification of Germany there have been several projects and speculations for the site, ranging from a museum to luxury housing, none of which has been brought to completion. During years of vacancy, decay and vandalism, the site has been used for various activities, and currently hosts a number of initiatives, artists, researchers and squaters are living there, the site attracts large crowds of tourists. The site hosts Field Stations eV, a non-profit organisation, that explores new models for developing architecture and its relationship with the environment at large.

THE EXPANDED FIELD

As the buildings on Teufelsberg and its layered history demonstrate, architecture cannot be reduced to just its constellation of material elements, and is subject to environmental, technologic and cultural changes. The built reality is only one layer that makes up the environments we inhabit, it is embedded within other material and immaterial layers, and it contributes to larger economic, material, environmental, informational and infrastructural systems. Within the Field Station Studio, we see the expanded field, this constantly changing, layered and hybrid environment as the context that architecture operates in and actively engages with.

The question of how architecture operates and relates to the expanded field is central to the studio, three closely related evolutions give this question an immediate urgency: (1) The evidence of the impact of humans on our planet is so extensive, that scientists are proposing the dawn of the Anthropocene as a new geological epoch. While architecture and urbanisation are major contributors to this impact, our way of thinking about and practicing architecture is modelled on a difference between nature and culture which can no longer be maintained. (2) Our environment is increasingly saturated by and mediated through technologies. Through sensors,

NSA headquarters Fort Meade, Maryland, US, 2013
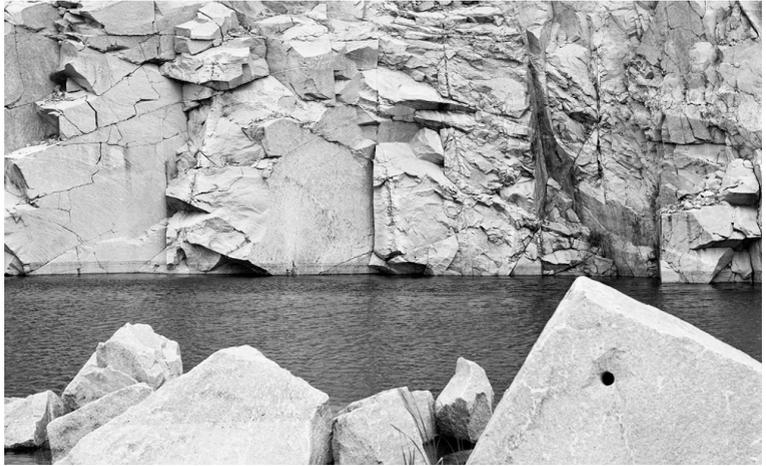
Tito Mouraz, Open Space Office, Untitled Project, 2011

mobile technology, big data, online platforms, augmented reality... technology is interwoven into the build fabric of our cities. Our culture is increasingly mediated through digital media: online blogs, social media providing a nonstop stream of information. Although this added layer of technologies, or techno-sphere, has as a drastic spatial and material impact, architecture seems to lack the tools of engaging with these spatial agencies. (3) Internet, social media, mobile technologies offer access to information everywhere and have the potential to change the way we act as a collective. This can be seen in informal actions like crowd funding, crowd sourcing, mass customisation, architecture can learn from these actions.

As a consequence of these points, the dichotomies that are at basis of architecture as a discipline are collapsing: there is no clear distinction anymore between nature and culture, between environment and building, between interior and exterior, between digital and material, between mediated and bodily experience. Within Field Station Studio, we see this layered, hybrid and technologically saturated environment as context, content and medium for architecture. These issues have the potential of rethink and expand our modes of operation, as architects we design embedded in this expanded field.

STATION AS AN ARCHITECTURAL TYPOLOGY

Military stations, observation posts and bunkers are only some examples of architectural structures that engage in a particular way with aspects of its surroundings, architecture has a rich and long history of stations as a typology: Form oil rigs, wind-mills, hydro stations, solar plants that harvest various forms of energy; Weather stations, telescopes, observatories, scientific field stations, space stations, that explore and map particular layers of our surroundings; Lighthouses, border checkpoints, customs, communication antenna that signal and demarcate different territories; To more modest refuges and cabanes, that provide shelter.

All these building typologies, while different in scale and program, use spatial strategies- ranging from extracting, occupying, camouflage, sensing, observing, filtering, exploring, probing - and architectural articulation to negotiate with their environment. Stations also vary in scale, scope and how they relate to different fields in time, from temporary or even mobile structures, dealing with time in seconds, over stuctures engaging with daily, monthly and yearly changes, to structures engaging geological time. The field station as an instance of an architectural typology is generally not a singular entity, it is situated within a field and relates to and communicates with larger networks. The studio builds on this lineage of architectural structures and how they relate to various fields, their networks and architectural articulation.

Bernd and Hilla Becher, 'Winding Towers', 1966-97

Walter Pichler, TV-Helm, Tragbares Wohnzimmer, 1967 Herman

Herman Asselberghs, Dear Steve, 2010

Pre-Radar Surveillance Device, Czech Republic, unknown.

EXTENDED PRACTICE

Architecture can learn from contemporary phenomena, technologies and strategies, present in other disciplines, which might seem to be outside of the realm of architecture. We believe we need to alter our standard ways of understanding architecture and habitual modes of operation in order for architecture to be relevant in the expanded field. Adopting approaches from other fields of artistic and design practice, media arts, installation, performance, video games and interaction design, might enable us to disrupt disciplinary constraints and extend architectural practices into new domains. We are particularly interested in potential pathways being opened by new models of collaboration, open source, hacking, tinkering… etc. Students are actively encouraged to find their own set of tools media and modes of working, we expect a high quality and personal output.
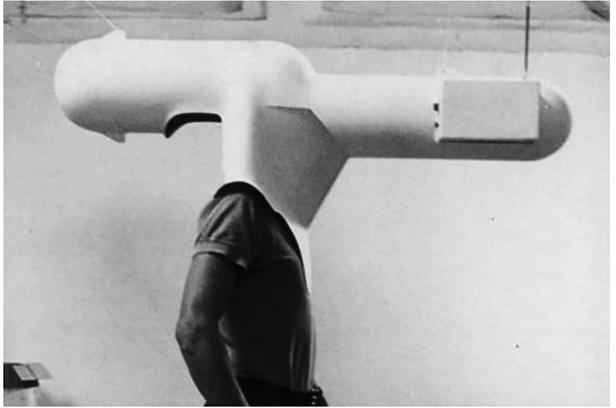
BRIEF

As a consequence of the various contexts outlined Field Station Studio does not operate in an academic vacuum but in the expanded field, exploring potential and addressing real world challenges. The studio operates as a non-hierarchical platform for sharing and developing ideas and collaborate with external partners, next to developing individual projects there will be collective and collaborative tasks, discussions, events, publications. Rather than finding resolute answers the studio aims to explore potential and raise questions: What role can architect play in this contemporary, layered and complex environment, in this expanded field? What can architecture learn from technological, social, cultural developments? How do we develop protocols, working models for operating within this expanded field? The assignment is split up in two parts, each focusing on part of the issues at hand.
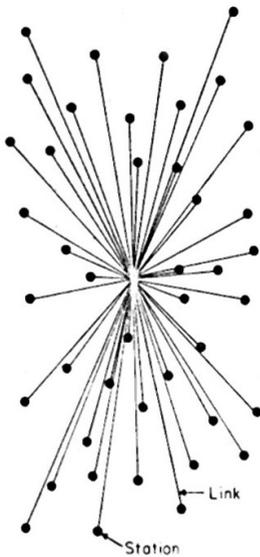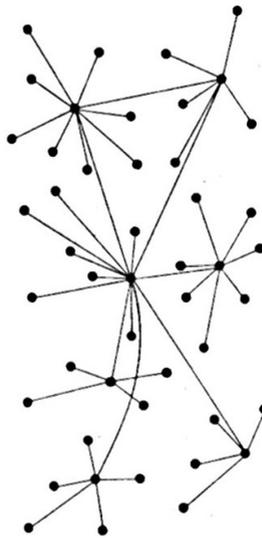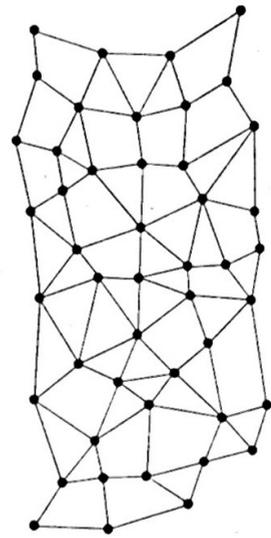
Centralized, Decentralized Distribted Network, source wikipedia

anthroposcene

disruptive

expanded field

exploration

future practice

hackbase

hacking

hyperconnectivity

master

media

model
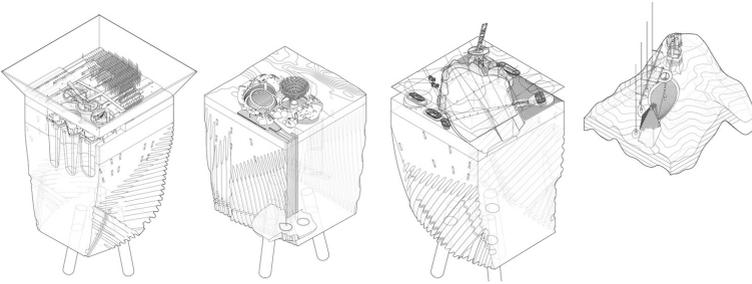
NSA

open source

platform

potential

practice

**prototype**

technosphere

work

PART I: FIELD (STATION)

Starting from study trip to Field Station Berlin and reading, presenting and discussing examples and theoretical texts, the aim of the first part is to collectively identify, map and categorise potential layers that make up the expanded field for architecture. In groups of three, students develop a concept for Field Station, following questions can help in driving this process: Which layer(s) of the expanded field does the Field station relate to? How does it relate other Field Stations? How does this field affect the architectural articulation of the station(s)? Which architectural parameters are influencing and defining the relationship between station and field? How does the field station relate to time? Which architectural strategies are employed?

The design is iteratively developed and results in a contextless design, in the form of a series of prototypes for (a) Field Station(s). The assignment leads to catalogue of prototypes, their format, scale, the media used and nature of the output, twill depend on the content of the project.
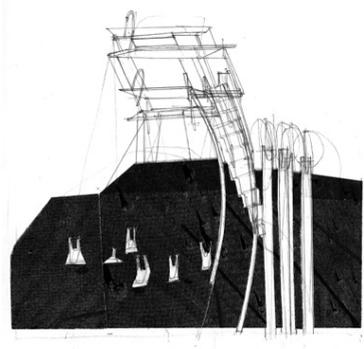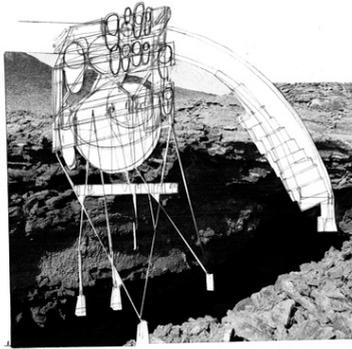
Smout Allen, Neo Natures: Lanzarote, 2015

PART II: (FIELD) STATION

In the second part an extensive workshop will introduce students to the concrete situation of S14, a hack base in Antwerp, an existing building with a given program, site, context, concept, occupants, ways of operating, building and making. In an individual exercise, the concepts and prototypes resulting from the first part will be further developed and implemented through the confrontation with this concrete situation and the questions and potential it raises. Students are free to interpret this concrete situation in terms of scope, scale, program, strategy etc. Through an itterative design process this is developed into a proper architectural proposal, with its own internal logic. The nature of this project and to what aspects of S14 it relates to depends on the content of the project.

This design results in a concrete architectural proposal, documented as a conventional project, with a complete set of drawings, details, models, and images.

TIMING

W01: INTRODUCTION + WORKSHOP: COLLECTING FIELDS

W02: REFINING FIELDS + MAPPING MEDIA + CASES

W03: STUDY TRIP FIELD STATION BERLIN

W04: PART I

W05: PART I + INTERNAL REVIEW

W06: PART I

W07: PRESENTATION PART I + INTENSIVE WORKSHOP

W08: PART II

W09: PART II

W10: PART II

W11: PART II + INTERNAL REVIEW

W12: PART II

W13: PART II

W14: FINAL PRESENTATION

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