

DIPLOMA 6

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From here to

KINGDOM

COME

2012 to 13.0.0.0.0

www.unknownfieldsdivision.com



UNKNOWN FIELDS

*Over the Mountains of the Moon, down the Valley of the Shadow, ride, boldly ride...if
you seek for El Dorado."*

Edgar Allen Poe

The Unknown Fields Division is a nomadic design studio that ventures out on biannual expeditions to the ends of the earth exploring unreal and forgotten landscapes, alien terrains, and obsolete ecologies. Each year we navigate a different global cross section and seek to map the complex and contradictory realities of the present as a site of strange and extraordinary futures. For Unknown Fields the journey is really about seeing our familiar world differently; we explore these alternative worlds as a means to understand our own in new ways, either through physical expeditions or the design of speculative future projects.

Far from the metropolis lie the dislocated hinterlands that support the mechanizations of urban life. A city like London is thoroughly embedded in a global network of landscapes and infrastructures that are typically forgotten, unseen, ignored or only presented through particular media narratives. Unknown Fields aims to remap the city and the technologies it contains not as discrete, independent collections of buildings and spaces but as a networked object that conditions and is conditioned by a wide array of local and global landscapes. By developing an atlas of these supply chains, from consumption all the way back to its source in the ground we can begin to understand the complex connections that exist between our everyday lives and a wider global context.

12/13 STUDIO AGENDA

IN SEARCH OF CIVILISATION

Just as Troy and Samarkand, Timbuktu and Rome, in the Old World, so the great Maya cities rose and fell, over a span of some two thousand years. During that span, the cities of Nakbe, El Mirador, Tikal, Copan, Uxmal, Chichen Itza, Mayapan, and a host of others enjoyed careers of expansion and prosperity and eventually declined, each in its time. ¹

This year as the world of new agers, mystics and psychonauts pilgrimage south, Unknown Fields journeys with them to Central America to ponder the rise and fall of cities, civilizations, and empires, both ancient and modern, and to investigate the cultural and technological infrastructures that underpin them – a network of complex systems that have proved critical to their prosperity and ultimately often implicated in their collapse.

Empires rise and fall and the infrastructural traces they leave behind are evidence of their greatest dreams and their deepest fears. They are the remains of a speculative future, the skeletal frames of world building dreams, the ruled lines on a page soon to be filled with the goings on of a day soon to come. In this time of crisis the future is becoming a project again. As the Mayan long count calendar begins a new phase we will imagine what comes next.

¹ **The Ancient Maya: Fifth Edition** By Robert Share

AUTUMN TERM

REVEALING STORIES

The infrastructure that drove the development of cities and that connect cities to the landscapes that support them is largely thought of as physical networks – transport, energy, plumbing, agriculture - and these are on the whole what survives long after civilisations decline, but these places are also interconnected by ideas and stories.

As creative people, we have the ability to construct realities for others to inhabit, to help shape cultural narratives and inform the way we collectively think about the world. So a large part of considering these landscapes has to be about the stories we construct as a culture around them, whether through political spin, science fiction, nature documentary, environmental protest, disaster film, fairy tale, folklore or scientific analysis, the narratives are many and varied. Men set out in search of foreign lands inspired by stories; to learn about the exotic, to exchange knowledge, to trade. We are voyaging to Central America in 2012 because of a myth about the end of the world. By understanding the mythology and the stories we carry with us about distant landscapes and disrupting or intervening within them as a site just as real as any physical condition, we can begin to bridge a gap between the here and there.

These connections fuse dislocated places - making a hybridized architectural space defined by virtual and physical journeys, of varying speed, duration and time. Through a series of time-based media workshops, you will be asked to explore the idea of connectivity. Seeing infrastructure as a series of interwoven narratives we will reveal a network of hidden stories that connect us to remote locations. These will be explored through a series of dynamic and active pieces of work.

We will be joined by luminaries from the fields of film, animation, storytelling, gaming and choreographic drawings who will help us to construct dynamic spaces of motion and commotion, cycles and shifts, ebbs and flows. These collaborators will augment the studio with skills workshops and group discussions and through these personal explorations in time you will develop your own language to represent scenarios across time and a body of research informing a polemical argument. They may be hopeful inventions or unexpected by-products, wondrous possibilities or dark cautionary tales.

FIELD WORK

CENTRAL AMERICA - 2012 to 13.0.0.0

"You're searching, Joe, for things that don't exist; I mean beginnings. Ends and beginnings -- there are no such things. There are only middles." Robert Frost

We travel to Central America for winter solstice 2012, amidst the doomsday frenzy, to the centre of ancient Maya, to see the remnants of a remarkable civilization and the markings their greatest endeavours, passions and ambitions have made upon the landscape - recognising in the rise and decline of that great civilization the same processes that define all human endeavour. Here we will witness the ushering in of a new phase in the Mesoamerican Long Count Calendar, which promises contrary to popular belief, not the end of the world but simply the dawn of a new cycle. We explore ideas of transition - resets, revisions, rethinks and the reworking of existing norms. As some prepare for endings and others announce new beginnings, we look at 'fresh middles' - the messy in-between and the connections.

As we continue in our quest to uncover systems and landscapes that have sustained vast civilisations, thriving kingdoms and sprawling conurbations, we turn our attention to the present. We will walk the streets of one of the world's megacities, Mexico City. Built originally on an island of Lake Texococo, this one time capital of the Aztec Empire was destroyed and rebuilt as one of the great centres of the Spanish Empire. Mexico City is now described variously as an Alpha City, a World City and a Global City – a strategic urban hub for a burgeoning planetary civilisation. We will witness a haphazard

infrastructure under great strain, and follow the resource trails that link it in obvious and unexpected ways to the landscapes surrounding it and to our more familiar London setting. We will view these connections as stories, stories borne in water pipes, fuelled with oil, stories transported by sea, road, air, wire, and through the electronic ether. We will also be looking for hidden narratives, uncovering stories of the illicit and illegal - global black markets, drug running and animal trafficking. Along our journey will find a wealth of interconnected infrastructural stories, ancient as the silent Mayan temples that sit deep in rainforests and fresh as the burgeoning Mexican tech industry.

SPRING + SUMMER TERM

PROVOKING TALES

In this brave you now what will we erase, rewrite and imagine a new? For your major project you will breathe life into new and emerging infrastructures. A constellation of stories and strategies, fragments and fables. We will develop observations based on systems and stories to weave a series of non linear narratives and 'hypertext' spaces—architecture built from dislocated places, stitched together by trajectories and time, plotting contemporary relationships between culture and infrastructure.

Students will define their own agendas, taking a critical position towards notions of cultural infrastructure. In the division we do not design 'architecture as object', rather we design and illustrate architectural scenarios that become critical instruments for exploring the consequences of emerging technological and ecological conditions. Your work will acknowledge multiple possibilities and parallel futures. Projects may take the form of films, animations, illustrated novels, events, performative models and so on. We ask you to explore alternative forms for the architectural project. We ask you to question the format of a folio and to question the medium in which the project is produced, to question who the audience is for the work and the way it is ultimately disseminated. Dextrous adaptability and contingency thinking alongside agile acts of speculation will serve to build a coherent and sophisticated body of work, exquisitely executed and powerfully argued.

SKUNKWORKS TECHNICAL STUDIO

Although wonderfully provocative our projects will be grounded in rigorous technical investigation, which will be embedded and tutored within the design studio in collaboration with key experts. Modelled after Lockheed Martins XPlanes division this is the Diploma 6 'Skunkworks' experimental technologies department. Together we embrace and explore technologies from the military, mining, aeronautics, biology and material sciences and investigate how these processes inform architectural innovation. Within the studio we have developed a strong history of award winning technical projects where we emphasise a dialogue between physical material testing and digital experimentation and simulation. In this way your projects will become both a wildly imaginative design speculation and a rigorous technical investigation. It is in this rigor that your projects will find their critical edge.

We will develop the role of the architect as agitator and the potential of the architectural project to instigate debate and discussion as opposed to describing discrete objects. You will position your project within a rich history of architectural provocations and develop your own individual polemic that will have a currency beyond the walls of this building and extend into your future practice. Embedded in any worthwhile speculation is the element of risk and we will look for dangerous and confronting projects. We encourage you to brave with your work in an institution that once defined itself by the controversy of its agenda.

Joining us in the division will be fellow time travellers from the worlds of technology, science and fiction and together we will examine the Unknown Fields between cultivation and nature and spin cautionary tales of a new kind of wilderness.