



# A WORLD ADrift

**-CHINA SEAS-**  
WINTER EXPEDITION 2013

**UNKNOWN  
FIELDS**

[www.unknownfieldsdivision.com](http://www.unknownfieldsdivision.com)

**AA DIPLOMA 6**  
**UNKNOWN FIELDS DIVISION**  
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# **A WORLD ADrift**

*“The sea, in fact, is the state of barbaric vagueness and disorder out of which civilisation has emerged and into which, unless saved by the effort of gods and men, it is always liable to relapse.”*

W.H Auden, The Enchanted Flood.

The Unknown Fields Division is a nomadic design studio that ventures out on expeditions to the ends of the earth to bear witness to alternative worlds, alien landscapes, industrial ecologies and precarious wilderness. These distant landscapes - the iconic and the ignored, the excavated, irradiated and the pristine - are embedded in global systems that connect them in surprising and complicated ways to our everyday lives. Unknown Fields remaps and reimagines the city and the technologies it contains not as discrete, independent collections of buildings and devices but as a relational object that conditions and is conditioned by a wide array of local and global supply chains, a network of vast but elusive tendrils that twist threadlike over everything around us, crisscrossing the planet, connecting the mundane to the extraordinary. In such a landscape of interwoven narratives, the studio deploys time-based media to animate this network of hidden stories and reimagine the complex and contradictory realities of the present as a site of strange and extraordinary futures.

## **FIELD EXPEDITION**

### **WINTER 2013: CHINA SEAS**

This year we travel East, to China and beyond, tracing the shadows of the world's desires across China Seas along supply chains and cargo routes, to explore the dispersed choreographies and atomised geographies that global sea trade brings into being. These are the contours of our distributed city, stretched around the earth from the hole in the ground to the high street shelf. Consignments of the precious and industrial, raw and refined, mechanical and alive, drift across infrastructural seas, suspended in maritime space on vast Panamax, Aframax and Suezmax, from cavernous factory floors via huge ports like Shanghai and Ningbo-Zhoushan, Singapore and Busan and onwards to navigate the bottleneck excavations of Panama and Suez en route to the West.

Our journey to East Asia will take in a cross-section of this supply chain. From source to sea, we will chart the journey of this and that, bits and bobs and thingamajigs; wander wholesale markets the size of cities, trawling Yiwu's 4-million-square-metre bazaar [supplier of pound-lands and dollar-stores across the globe, and responsible for 1,000 containers leaving China a day] via the mega ports of Shanghai and Busan our route will take in some of the biggest cargo infrastructure on earth, as we ride alongside containers of stuffed toys and arsenal scarves, digital devices and pound shop tat, setting sail along the shipping lanes of the East China Sea and beyond. Our design speculations will operate within this dislocated city, where intense pockets of activity in wildly unexpected places supply cultures far removed with the fulfilment of their every need and desire.<sup>i</sup>

# AUTUMN TERM

## CULT CARGO

*“To scrutinize the trivial can be to discover the monumental. Almost any object can serve to unveil the mysteries of engineering and its relation to art, business and all other aspects of culture.”*

Henry Petroski, *The Pencil: A History*.

As the sale bell rings, we reach into our pockets, flash our screens and flick our fingers across a luminous landscape of objects and information. Our cities are extraordinary constellations of products, goods and technologies. We understand who we are by the trail of objects we leave behind. From the smallest and most inconsequential of objects to the most intricate and complex, these material things set in motion a vast, planetary scale infrastructure. Our cities cast shadows that stretch far and wide. In a world of bytes and bitcoins, cyberspace and clouds, 90% of the world's cargo still travels by sea. It is not beamed or teleported, or conjured into existence along strings of fibre optics but rather it is dragged across the planet in heaving steel mega ships, gizzards fill with glistening gadgets and gizmos from distant lands. Midstream, a muddy estuary near a port, a forgotten space, out of sight, out of mind; upstream, the hinterland, a greenly continent; downstream, other ports, great harbour cities, oceans, one hundred thousand invisible ships, a half million invisible sea farers binding the world together through trade. <sup>1</sup>The secret lives of objects span across a notional factory floor that reaches from the high street pound shop all the way to the resource fields of the Far East.

We will begin our investigation of this world adrift through the lens of a single object. We will reimagine an object in its system and then reimagine the system producing its object. We will slowly zoom out from the artefact to the supply chain as the first term unfolds as a series of experimental and exploratory design projects, with the expectation that you develop a highly creative, personal approach to the themes of the year. Grounded in real world research the unit will create a world of speculative, surreal and provocative objects, which will act as vehicles for exploring the use, cultural significance, origin, technology, manufacture or materiality of 'things'.

In parallel we will be running weekly intensive workshops in time-based media, from film making to motion graphics and animation. Through these media workshops, you will be asked to explore the idea of connectivity, strategies, tactics and scenarios. Revealing a network of hidden stories that ripple outwards from the objects you create, as the intimate scale connects to the global, tying us into a multitude of local and 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.

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<sup>1</sup> Text from *The Forgotten Space* (2010), Directed by Allan Sekula and Noel Burch

# SPRING + SUMMER TERM

## MADE IN EVERYWHERE

*Of all the jumbles of matter in the world the sea is the most invisible and the most profound.”*

Victor Hugo, *Toilers of the Sea*.

Where things are made is a large part of their identity. In a world where everything is made in everywhere, what does this mean for the way we think about our cities and the material things that furnish them? Factories have become atomised and distributed across the planet. The mega ships drift as buildings, plying fixed routes between producing countries and consuming countries, the giant floating warehouses of the ‘just in time’ system of distribution, while factories become ship like, stealing away, stealthily, in the dead of night, restlessly searching for ever cheaper labour. The sea remains the crucial space of globalization. Nowhere else is the disorientation, violence, and alienation of contemporary capitalism more manifest.<sup>2</sup>

For the year’s major project you will design within these planetary systems and strategies, imagining new stories and counter narratives for a series of real, imagined, speculative or absurd objects and their supply chains. We will reveal the city as a networked landscape caught within the ever shifting tangles of supply line and shipping lane, and crafted from invisible connections and hidden relationships - dynamic cultural and material exchanges orchestrated by the push and pull of needs and wants.

The polemics we develop through our time-based explorations will evolve into strategies and tactics, choreographies and dynamic interventions sited within and along global manufacturing routes. Across these seas our architectural interventions will coalesce like clouds, condensing around engineered systems of flows and streams. We will reimagine how we interact with these networks, designing objects, architectures and scenarios with resonate effects, that can change and redirect systems, tactical objects, choreographic objects, atomised, and distributed, reprogramming the world and generating new encounters and relationships with the complexities of a global context.

Students will define their own agendas, taking a critical position towards notions of cultural infrastructures and global manufacturing. 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 dynamic installations. 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.

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.

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<sup>2</sup> Text from *The Forgotten Space* (2010), Directed by Allan Sekula and Noel Burch

# TECHNICAL STUDIES

## UNKNOWN FIELDS SKUNKWORKS DIVISION

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 division. 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.

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.

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<sup>i</sup> \*Unknown Fields is a nomadic studio based around an annual field expedition. Participation in the field trip is recommended but is not a compulsory part of the studio.

\*Provisional expedition dates - Christmas break 10-23rd December [to be confirmed]

\*Approximate expedition funding required per student - £1200 including all flights, travel expenses, events, workshops and accommodation [excluding meals]