

OPEN SPACE

FIELD CONDITIONS

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It is with a heavy heart that I mourn the loss of Lebbeus Woods. He was a tremendous inspiration to me in my pursuit of architecture, and I was incredibly fortunate to work closely with him over the past year. Our long conversations at his table will forever illuminate my mind. His visionary work will continue to influence the discourse for countless years to come. I dedicate the exhibition Field Conditions to him and his enduring legacy. –Joseph Becker



Field Conditions installation view, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 2012;
photo: Matthew Millman



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Joseph Becker

Can there be architecture without buildings? What if a wall or a floor went on forever? The works in our current show, *Field Conditions*, pose these questions and more about the construction, experience, and representation of space. In an attempt to expand our general interpretation of architectural ideas, its focus is on an array of projects by both artists and architects that redefine the relationships between invisible and visible, figure and ground, finite and infinite. As an exhibition, *Field Conditions* feels like the tip of the iceberg to me, a leaping-off point for further investigation and analysis on these intersections between art and architecture practice and the abstract concept of “space” as a subject. The SFMOMA presentation, with 13 projects by 11 artists and architects, is of course limited by the physical factors of the gallery and as such cannot begin to be a complete and comprehensive analysis of the topic and theory that interests me here. Of course, neither can a singular essay devoted to the subject, although I did map out a semi-comprehensive 15-page outline as a beginning. Suzanne asked me to publish this, incomplete and as-is, on Open Space, and in this age of attention deficit and information over-saturation, I was excited to re-imagine the essay format for the space of the web. The great advantage of web-publishing — the possibility of immediate derailment, disorientation, or adventure down the rabbit hole. So, with that in mind, please scan, peruse, click, enjoy.

I'd also like to call out an invaluable collaborator on this project: my research assistant **Aviva Rubin**. Her dedication and energy behind both the exhibition and this post has been beyond incredible and has made everything possible.



Field Conditions installation view, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 2012;
photo: Matthew Millman

- *Introduction*

- o Systems, chaos theory, movements, processes, generative instructions – all are employed in the works included in SFMOMA’s new exhibition, Field Conditions.
- o The ‘field’ emerges from a diverse array of disciplines and influences, beginning in the 1950s.
- o Defining the field condition, architect and theorist Stan Allen describes it as “any formal or spatial matrix capable of unifying diverse elements while respecting the identity of each. Field configurations are loosely bounded aggregates characterized by porosity and local interconnectivity... What is intended here is a close attention to the production of difference at the local scale, even while maintaining a relative indifference to the form of the whole.” [Stan Allen, “Stan Allen: Distributions, Combinations, Fields – Preliminary Notes,” in *A+U: Architecture + Urbanism* 08, no.335 (Aug 1998): 4]
- o Separation between viewing subject, viewed object, and space between (aka the environment) is dissolved.

- Rafael Lozano-Hemmer
 - o Programming without teleology – non-linear
- Relational
 - Produces the seemingly natural and the ambiguous
 - Vectors moving in relation to surrounding movement
 - *Peter Jellitsch*
 - o Each work performs as a sequence in a series of drawings
 - o Vectors act as an intertwined flow, moving together
 - *Rafael Lozano-Hemmer [R L-H]*
 - o ‘Relational Architecture’
 - o Against the term ‘collective’ and instead for ‘connective’
 - o Collective presupposes one interpretation when R L-H supports many readings, perceptions
 - o “‘Relational’ emphasizes the dematerialization of the real environment and asks us to question the dissimulation” [Jose Luis Barrios interview with R L-H in *Rafael Lozano-Hemmer: Subsculptures*, p.16]
 - o ‘Subsculptures’ are different than Relational Architecture but he doesn’t have a specific definition
 - o “it has to do with contagion matrices” [R L-H, p.16]
 - o Chaos Theory – fractal pattern – non-linear phenomena
 - o “Multi-perspectival flow that unfolds in various dimensions...’possibility’ as a form of construction” [R L-H, p.16]
- Disruptions, imperfections, errors, defects
 - Jellitsch and Lozano-Hemmer both exploit their works’ imperfections – Jellitsch through the use of his hand drawing and Lozano-Hemmer through human interaction.
 - Produces the unexpected
 - *Peter Jellitsch*
 - o Translating digitally generated information into analog drawings in order to extract differences between the digital and analog outcomes as well as the repetitions of movements in its reproduction.
 - *Rafael Lozano-Hemmer*

o “The resulting effect are patterns of interference very similar to those that can be seen, for example in a tank of water into which various drops fall” [R L-H, p.16]

o “I like discrepancies, the remainder in a division, and rounding errors. I find modularization boring and homogenizing” [R L-H, p.16]

- Not based on Chance

- R L-H sees John Cage and Marcel Duchamp as pioneers of chance but he argues that random cannot be created from mathematics or technology and therefore he deems it uninteresting. Uncertainty or unexpected processes is where he focuses and suggests others focus



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photo: Matthew Millman

- *Rafael Lozano-Hemmer*

- “Foucaultian concept of technologies for the gaze” [R L-H, p.5]
 - o “My installations almost always ‘watch the watchers,’ as Daniel Garcia Andujar would say” [R L-H, p.16]
 - o Panoptic – predatory – surveillance cameras
 - o Art can listen and see its viewers – it has a life – autonomy
 - o “Pieces listen to us, they see us, they sense our presence and wait for us to inspire them, and not the other way around... The work is a platform and yes the platform has an authorship, but it also has its points of entry, its loose ends, its tangents, its empty spaces and its eccentricities.” [R L-H, p.6]

o “Exploring the culture of paranoia” [R L-H, p.27]

o *Scott Snibbe + Grivilux [iphone, ipad app] + Semiconductor [20Hz] + Reas [Process 7] + Katie Paterson [History of Darkness] + Tauba Auerbach [Static 6]*

- Contemporary techniques – data processing, sensors, etc.

- *Scott Snibbe*

- o Grivilux: interactive deformations on a gravitational field

- Data Visualization

- o [Ben Fry Interview]

- Representation of instant within infinite processes

- “Deleuze offers the term ‘perplication’ to describe...the visualization of concurrent ideas that appear to be the same yet different at the same time. As ideas mature in time, they can be represented as instantiations – blips on the radar screen. They are developments of a theme, self-intersecting prominences and subversions occurring at different times in any muse while maintaining a common thread. In other words, the visual representation is a pictorialisation of our mental space. Rather than regard our thoughts and theories as part of a linear continuum, we might regard them as forming a landscape of turmoil where subconscious and conscious ideals and desires interweave. In rendering this landscape as a perplication, I am positing this as a continuum having no lateral boundaries, in which subconscious thoughts interweave through each other, emerging as the conscious anywhere that it becomes uncovered. This rendering is therefore an extracted section from this landscape, a liminal representation of a state of mind not necessarily calm at any particular time.” [Mark Burry, “Between Surface and Substance,” AD: Surface Consciousness, 2003, p.14]

- Visualizing the invisible / incomprehensible

- *Semiconductor*

- o 20Hz

- See “Inaudible Cities” or “Brilliant Noise” from *Semiconductor: Worlds In Flux* DVD for more

- o Earth’s magnetic activity displayed

- o Considering what lies beyond our inhabitable space



Tauba Auerbach, *50/50 Floor* (detail) installed in *Field Conditions*, 2012; © Tauba Auerbach; photo: Matthew Millman

Joseph Becker is SFMOMA assistant curator of architecture and design. *Field Conditions* is on view now through January 6. This Thursday night, November 1, join us for a conversation with Rafael Lozano-Hemmer on radio technology and other subjects, followed by a performance by experimental composer Seth Horvitz.